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# ONE MAN ALONE



*"One man and one man alone has ranged the Italian people in deadly struggle against the British Empire, and has deprived Italy of the sympathy and intimacy of the United States of America."*

MR. CHURCHILL, IN A BROADCAST TO THE ITALIAN  
NATION DELIVERED ON DECEMBER 23RD, 1940

# ONE MAN ALONE

*The History of  
Mussolini and the Axis*

BY  
MAXWELL H. H. MACARTNEY

CHATTO & WINDUS

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## PREFACE

WHEN Mr. Churchill for the first time publicly put upon Signor Mussolini the sole responsibility for having dragged his people into war with the British Empire, he gave currency to a view the essential truth of which has been proved by events. Eleven years of work in Italy as Correspondent of *The Times*—from 1927 to 1937 and again in 1939–40—and an acquaintance with the country which began in 1885 had led me to the same conclusion. It is on the strength of this experience at first hand, and of close contacts which I have maintained since June 10th, 1940, with Italian circles in Great Britain, that I have traced the inevitability of Signor Mussolini sooner or later stampeding his countrymen into armed conflict with ourselves, and that I have outlined the gradual collapse under the stress of modern war of the gimcrack Fascist regime. By a curious coincidence the first draft of this book was finished on the very day which saw Signor Mussolini's downfall. That event, of course, necessitated certain minor modifications and additions, but it obviously provided a convenient date for rounding off the narrative as a whole, and no pretence is made to have covered in any detail occurrences subsequent to July 25th, 1943.

LONDON, September 1943

*ONE MAN ALONE*

IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE CONFORMITY  
WITH THE AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

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## CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

IT was supremely fitting that Signor Mussolini's downfall should have been brought about by that war into which, against all the advice of his best political and military advisers and in defiance of the wishes of the vast majority of his fellow-countrymen, he had so wantonly plunged just over three years before. Italian pride sought to spread abroad the belief that the abrupt end of Signor Mussolini's dictatorship was purely a matter of domestic politics. This is, of course, absurd. So long as Signor Mussolini was winning cheap triumphs and was enabling Italians to fancy that they were cutting a *bella figura* in the world neither the King nor Marshal Badoglio nor any prominent Italian showed either the courage or the will publicly to criticize the fundamentally immoral aspects of his regime. But when the braggart was squarely beaten in the field by those forces of democracy upon which he had poured such torrents of coarse, boastful and vulgar abuse, a very different story was heard. From the outset the self-created First Marshal of the Empire had shown himself grossly incompetent to direct the major modern war that he had so deliberately provoked, and his personal prestige never recovered from the humiliating reverses inflicted upon him by the gallant little army of Greece, from the claws of which he was only rescued by the intervention of his German ally.

On more than one occasion Signor Mussolini was saved by his Nazi friend and ally. But Nemesis, though slow-footed, seized Signor Mussolini at last. At a hasty meeting held between the two dictators on July 19th, 1943, Signor Mussolini was, it is widely believed, informed by Herr Hitler that the serious predicament of the German armies in Russia made the urgently-needed despatch of reinforcements to Italy on a large scale impossible, and that in the circumstances the impending conquest of Sicily by the United Nations made advisable, if not necessary, the abandonment of the Italian mainland up to the plain of Lombardy. In this proposal Signor Mussolini acquiesced. But this was the last straw. A revolt broke out amongst those influential Fascist leaders who, however faulty their military conceptions and suspect their patriotic motives, rebelled against such a sacrifice



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of Italian territory. In the late afternoon of Saturday, July 24th, the Fascist Grand Council, the supreme organ of the Fascist regime, met for the first time since December 8th, 1939, and, after a stormy discussion which lasted until 3 A.M. on Sunday, Count Grandi carried by 19 votes to 7 with one abstention an Order of the Day which declared that the Grand Council

"... after examining the internal situation and the international one, and the political and military conduct of the war, proclaims it the sacred duty of all Italians to defend at all costs the unity, independence and liberty of the country, the fruits of the sacrifices and endeavours of four generations from the *Risorgimento* until to-day, the existence and future of the Italian people; asserts the necessity for the moral and material union of all Italians in this grave hour which is decisive for the destinies of the nation; declares that, to this end, it is necessary immediately to re-establish all the functions of the State, attributing to the Crown, to the Grand Council, to the Government, to Parliament, to the Corporations all the responsibilities laid down by law, statutes and the Constitution; and invites the Head of the Government to beg His Majesty the King, to whom the whole nation turns with heartfelt fidelity and trust, for the honour and salvation of the country, to take over the actual command of all armed forces, land, sea and air, in accordance with article 5 of the Constitution of the Kingdom, and the supreme initiative of decision, which our institutions attribute to him, and which has always been all through our national history the glorious inheritance of our august Savoy dynasty."

Among those who voted with Count Grandi were Signor Federzoni, the old Nationalist who had been Minister for the Colonies and was then President of the Italian Royal Academy; Marshal De Bono and Count De Vecchi, the two surviving *Quadrumviri* of the March on Rome; Count Ciano, Signor Mussolini's son-in-law; Signor Bottai, perhaps the best brain in the Fascist Party; and Signor Bastianini, called by Signor Mussolini only a few months before to help him at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The game was up. Signor Mussolini was compelled to seek an audience with King Victor Emmanuel during the afternoon. His resignation was tendered and accepted, and Marshal Badoglio was appointed in his place. Whether wittingly or not, the Grand Council had passed a death sentence on Fascism. The King and Marshal Badoglio were prompt to seize their chance. Disregarding the terms of Count Grandi's Order of the Day, Marshal Badoglio's quickly-

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formed Cabinet had within a few days swept away the Fascist Party, the Fascist Grand Council, the Special Tribunal for the Defence of the State and the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations. Other measures followed in rapid succession. By the following Thursday (July 29th) when Signor Mussolini reached the age of 60 much of the Fascist façade which had disfigured the Italian State during his dictatorship of nearly twenty-one years had already been torn down amidst the exuberant rejoicing of the nation. Signor Mussolini's disgrace was thus trebly bitter to him. He had been beaten in battle by those Democracies at which he had so scornfully jeered; he had been deposed by a mutiny of his own creatures, and he saw swept away that Fascist system which, he had boasted, was destined to dominate the 20th century. His fall could not have been more appropriately "totalitarian".<sup>1</sup>

From the day of the March on Rome onwards it was virtually inevitable that, if Signor Mussolini remained in power, he would ultimately embroil his country in a major international war. Indeed he admitted as much when in announcing his declaration of war upon Great Britain and France<sup>2</sup> he confessed that the struggle upon which Italy was about to engage was "only a phase in the logical development" of the Fascist Revolution. Some writers<sup>3</sup> who certainly cannot be classed among Signor Mussolini's maudlin admirers have maintained that he is too vitally Italian to be a really convinced militarist, and that if he has completely contradicted his youthful utterances it is because events have proved too strong for him. It is not easy to accept this view, because in the first place Signor Mussolini, paradoxical as it may sound, is in many respects not a typical Italian, and because, in the

<sup>1</sup> Signor Mussolini, on leaving the Villa Savoia after his brief and stormy audience with the King, was put under protective arrest. He was transferred to several places of confinement, and finally was abducted by the Germans from the Gran Sasso though the *carabinieri* guarding him had orders to shoot him if a rescue were attempted. Thus Signor Mussolini, now exposed as a mere tool of Herr Hitler, was enabled to set up behind German bayonets a puppet "Republican Fascist Government" in opposition to the legitimate Government of the King and Marshal Badoglio, compelled to take refuge with the Allies owing to the swift military reaction of the Germans to the announcement on September 8th of the Italian capitulation.

<sup>2</sup> See below, Chapter Five.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Ernest Hambloch on p. 198 of his book *Italy Militant*, Duckworth, 1941.

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second place, he always was and still is essentially a fighter by nature. His father, a blacksmith with the heart of an Anarchist, chose for him the name of Benito because that was the name of Benito Juarez, the Mexican adversary of Napoleon III and of the Emperor Maximilian. Never was a name more aptly bestowed. The youthful Benito Mussolini was headstrong, turbulent and combative. The entries made under his name in the police records soon grew to a disreputable length. He fled to Switzerland in order to dodge his military service. He knew what it was to be arrested. But in all his tirades against militarism, in all the fustian which he poured forth in the days when he was a revolutionary Socialist soap-box orator Signor Mussolini was first and foremost a fighter for himself alone. But with the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 his horizon widened. He did not want Italy to remain in the slenderly rewarded shades of unconditional neutrality. That the youthful and little known Mussolini was the decisive influence for Italy's intervention is a myth invented later by Fascist lick-spittles. He did, however, pay the price of his change of heart by being expelled from the Socialist Party. He founded the *Popolo d' Italia*, saw a little active service, was accidentally wounded, and returned to his desk to write patriotic articles. From that time war has been a subject rarely out of his mind.

How deeply Signor Mussolini's whole mentality has been impregnated by military ideas may be seen in many ways. He made a practice of wearing civilian clothes as seldom as possible; his normal garb being that of the Black Shirt Militia or, more recently, the uniform of First Marshal of the Empire—a rank which he created for himself after the conquest of Abyssinia and which he graciously consented to share with the King-Emperor alone. His language became steeped in military terms. When he decided to stimulate the Italian farmers into growing more corn he announced that he was launching a campaign, and, in due course, that he had won "the battle of the grain". A similar victory was said to have crowned his campaign in defence of the lira. The skimmed-milk "sanctions" applied against Italy by the League over Abyssinia were proclaimed to be a "siege". Nor was it only by the language of the *miles gloriosus* that he sought to bamboozle the Italians into fancying themselves a race of samurai. Writing in a more serious vein in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* Signor Mussolini declared that

"Above all, Fascism, with regard to the future and to the development of humanity, believes neither in the possibility nor in the

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utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates pacifism, which conceals a renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and imprints the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to face it. . . . Therefore a doctrine which is based a priori upon the postulate of peace is foreign to Fascism."

The same article also embodied a definition of the Fascist State as "a Will to Power and to Empire". The tendency towards Empire, that is to say expansion, was declared to be a manifestation of vitality, whereas its opposite was a token of decadence.

Not content with preaching these views on every possible occasion, Signor Mussolini set out at an early stage of his dictatorship to groom his countrymen for a new major war. He led off with the bombardment of Corfu in 1923. This, as it is easy to see now, was a critical case. The Italian military mission in Albania headed by General Tellini was ambushed on Greek territory while it was carrying out a task for the Ambassadors' Conference in Paris. Before the responsibility for the crime had been established and without waiting for the decision of the League, to which Greece had recourse, Signor Mussolini ordered warships to bombard and occupy the island of Corfu. Although Signor Mussolini was not allowed, in the event, to have matters entirely his own way, he won a sufficient triumph over the League to start him upon his path of flouting Geneva, whenever he felt in that mood. The occupation of Corfu, he boasted,<sup>1</sup> was not carried out solely as a sanction. It was intended also to increase the prestige of Italy. He considered the episode "of the very greatest importance" in the history of Italy, because it placed the problem of the League before the public in a way in which no number of books could have done. Signor Mussolini never uttered truer words. If the League had only taken its courage in both hands and acted with the appropriate energy Italy might, it is true, have withdrawn from Geneva, or Signor Mussolini might have fallen then and there, or both these contingencies might have happened. In any event, Signor Mussolini would have been taught a well-deserved lesson at the outset of his international career. His punishment then might well have deterred other nations in later years from cocking snooks at the League as they did. After having been treated with such clemency Signor Mussolini, puffed up with a greater conceit of himself than before, went on from minor war to minor war. Thanks in large degree to the ruth-

<sup>1</sup> Speech in the Senate on November 16th, 1923.

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less methods adopted by Marshal (then General) Graziani the Italians managed to reconquer Libya. There followed in due course the Abyssinian War; the thinly camouflaged and finally acknowledged participation in the Spanish Civil War masquerading under the guise of non-intervention, and, as a last achievement, the disgraceful and treacherous attack upon Albania. Thus Italy, as some Fascists affected proudly to boast, was kept by Signor Mussolini in a constant state of belligerency while his braves were being blooded.

Against which enemy of approximately similar standing, armed with all the weapons of modern warfare, were the Italian troops going to be launched? There was a period, as will be seen in the following chapter, when it looked as though Italy might conceivably fall out with Germany over Austria. Rome and Berlin had been snarling at one another off and on for years. The first bone of contention had been provided by the Italian administration of the German-speaking population in the Alto Adige. When Herr Hitler came to power he very wisely refused to carry on that quarrel. But the famous question of the *Anschluss*, or a Union between Germany and Austria, was another and a much more dangerous problem. Herr Hitler wished to bring his native country under his rule, while Signor Mussolini had openly declared that he refused to entertain even the hypothesis of Germany reaching the Brenner, and in this he had the backing of Great Britain and France. But Abyssinia broke up the Stresa front,<sup>1</sup> and the Axis was born of "sanctions", or of the failure to make "sanctions" effective. Against Russia and Japan there was no question of war. Still less against the United States of America. For all practical purposes, therefore, there remained only Great Britain and France.

The Great War had barely finished before Signor Mussolini had begun to bespatter both these countries with his vituperations. Before the Versailles Treaty had even been signed in 1919 Signor Mussolini was already shouting<sup>2</sup> about "the unbelievable ingratitude of France, the bad faith of the prophet Wilson, and the imperialist ambitions of the Anglo-Saxons and Greeks" which were defrauding Italy of her deserts. He demanded that all foreigners, the British in the first place, should be ejected from the Mediterranean, and he proceeded:

"We must afford all assistance possible to the revolutionary movement in Egypt—that ancient Roman Colony, the natural granary of Italy, which reckons 200,000 Italians amongst its inhabitants. There

<sup>1</sup> Constituted in April 1935.

<sup>2</sup> In the Teatro Verdi, Fiume.

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is also Malta, where an Italian Irredentist movement has been set on foot. As regards France, she must lose her Mediterranean Empire, beginning with Tunisia which already is Italian in its population. And what will happen to Fiume? The problem is already solved. Just as Italy made herself, so Fiume must act for itself. The decisions of the four old idiots in Paris will have no effect upon the sanction of the Italian people."

These words are particularly instructive in the light of subsequent history. There has been a tendency to regard Signor Mussolini as an opportunist and nothing more. Opportunist he has certainly shown himself to be. But that harangue illustrates the consistency of his fundamental strategic objectives, however much circumstances compelled him to modify his tactical plans. Both Great Britain and France were unceasingly abused by him for their preponderant responsibility in the drafting of the Treaty of Versailles and other treaties of the Paris Peace Settlement. Mr. Lloyd George was execrated as being chiefly responsible for the Treaty of St. Jean de Maurienne<sup>1</sup> being denounced and for the policy which, by provoking the victorious resistance of Ataturk (Mustapha Kemal), led to the Treaty of Lausanne and to the loss to Italy of a large proportion of the territories which she had hoped to gain under the Treaties of London and St. Jean de Maurienne. It was at Signor Mussolini's instigation that in June 1922 the Fascist Party passed a resolution condemning the British mandate in Palestine. Not long after he wrote an article demanding that Italy should "liberate herself once and for all from subjection to England". At the beginning of the very month that was to end with the March on Rome he wrote:

"For four years since the Armistice England has succeeded in practising the greatest political mystification possible at the expense of Europe and the rest of the world. It is in London that 'reconstruction' has been preached as a post-war dogma. . . . We have never had the slightest faith in that austere company of tricksters which sits at Geneva without having the least idea of the ridicule which surrounds it. Nor have we ever believed in British pacifism, in British 'reconstructionism', or in any of the other cloudy ideologies which come to us from the Anglo-Saxon world. We must prepare ourselves for the eventuality of a policy which is effectively anti-British. It is not in the interest of Italy to contribute to the maintenance of

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 54, 55 and others in *Italy's Foreign and Colonial Policy, 1914-37*, by Maxwell H. H. Macartney and Paul Cremona, Oxford University Press, 1938.

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the British Empire. The interest of Italy is to collaborate in its demolition." <sup>1</sup>

In a speech supposed to have been made to the National Directorate on June 24th, 1943, Signor Mussolini declared that "for me Enemy No. 1 is and always has been the Anglo-Saxon".

Signor Mussolini's seizure of power had a certain sobering effect upon him, though he professed himself deeply pained by the British attitude over Corfu. The Matteotti murder and its consequences also took up a good deal of his attention, and in the subsequent years he was busy consolidating his own personal power and the position of the Fascist regime. This period was, in fact, a golden era in Anglo-Italian relations. Signor Mussolini found in Sir Austen (then Mr.) Chamberlain a sympathetic colleague, with whom he could collaborate on intimate terms. It used to be a favourite subject of conversation in Rome to inquire jokingly "Who is the Italian Foreign Minister?", and when the answer came, "The English Foreign Minister", the original questioner responded, "Long may he remain so". This became so notorious that at last Signor Mussolini felt obliged to intercalate in a warm tribute to Anglo-Italian friendship the remark that

"the eminent statesman who directs the Foreign Affairs of the British Empire was even charged with having encouraged Fascist Imperialism, and some of the more recent events were explained as arising out of a kind of authorization which Chamberlain was alleged to have granted to Italian policy. Nothing could be more fantastic. The Italy of to-day does not require to beg for such an authorization of her policy. Italy is perfectly autonomous in the conduct of her foreign policy." <sup>2</sup>

But this prolonged honeymoon came to an abrupt finish with the dispute over Abyssinia. The dog returned to his vomit. Great Britain once again was singled out as the arch-enemy of Italy and of mankind in general. No lie was so base, no insult so foul but it would serve to foster the anti-British campaign in the officially-inspired Italian Press. The elementary facts of history were unblushingly distorted, and the Italian *Risorgimento* was declared to owe nothing to the support and sympathetic friendship and assistance of Great Britain. Such a situation could obviously not go on for ever; and on November 1st, 1936, Signor Mussolini made a speech in Milan in which he com-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Hambloch, *op.cit.*

<sup>2</sup> Speech in the Senate of June 5th, 1928.

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bined blustering threats with an uncouth, boorish form of "peace offer". Great Britain condescended to open negotiations. The outcome was the conclusion on January 2nd, 1937, of the so-called "Gentlemen's Agreement", whereby Great Britain and Italy recognized that entry to, exit from, and transit through the Mediterranean were a vital interest to the different parts of the British Empire and to Italy, and that these interests were in no way inconsistent with each other. They professed a wish to promote better relations between themselves and all Mediterranean States and they declared that neither of them wished to modify, or to see modified, the existing position as regards national sovereignty of territory in the Mediterranean.

The improvement in Anglo-Italian relations, such as it was, was transient. The instrument was too vague, and a conflict of interpretation and complaints of non-observance quickly followed. At the close of manoeuvres held in Sicily in August with the thinly-veiled object of testing the possibility of a British or French landing Signor Mussolini made a speech in which he laid down that anybody desirous of getting into his good books must recognize *de jure* the Italian Empire in Abyssinia; must accept the intangibility of the Rome-Berlin Axis, and agree to the complete expulsion of Bolshevism from Spain and the Mediterranean. The Italian Press proceeded to embroider upon these three conditions in various ways and with varying degrees of offensiveness. Eventually, however, fresh negotiations were opened and a new Agreement was concluded on April 16th, 1938. This Agreement was much more precise and wide than its predecessor. The signatories expressed the wish to put their relations upon a solid and lasting basis, and agreed that if either Party ever considered that changed circumstances made necessary a revision of certain provisions they would consult together for that purpose. Immediately after the instrument had come into operation the British, Italian and Egyptian Governments were to negotiate a definite settlement of the frontiers between the Sudan, Kenya, British Somaliland and Italian East Africa and to establish helpful economic and commercial relations. Similar arrangements were to be made between the British and Italian Governments with regard to Italian East Africa and all the territories of the British Empire. Of the eight appendices the first confirmed respect for the intangibility of the existing territorial, political and military conditions in the Mediterranean. The second provided for the interchange of military information. The third regulated British and Italian policy in the Red Sea and the riverain Arab States. The fourth forbade unfriendly



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publicity and propaganda. The fifth reaffirmed Italy's readiness to respect British interests in Lake Tana. The sixth bound Italy not to use the natives in East Africa except as local police and for territorial defence. The seventh dealt with British religious bodies. The eighth assured freedom of communication in the Red and Mediterranean Seas, and guaranteed the free use of the Suez Canal. The Agreement came into force on November 16th, 1938, when Great Britain formally recognized the Italian Empire in Abyssinia. It will be noticed, then, that apart from rectifications of frontiers Italy made no territorial demands whatsoever upon Great Britain. It was only through round-about, indirect sources that Great Britain was aware that Italy nurtured certain vague "natural aspirations" which comprised, as it was gathered, such claims as the cession of Malta, control over the Suez Canal, the return to Spain or the demilitarization and the internationalization of Gibraltar, and a Condominium in the Sudan. But such claims were never formulated, though Italy had abundant opportunities of so doing. The Agreement was supposed to have wiped the slate clean and to have put Anglo-Italian relations back upon the old friendly footing. If it did not do so <sup>1</sup> it was at any rate nominally in force when Italy declared war.

With France Italy's relations were much more consistently bad. In fact, except for a brief interlude which lasted for the few months that elapsed between the signature of the Laval-Mussolini Agreement of January 1935 and the conflict over Abyssinia, Italy and France had been growling and snapping at one another ever since the Great War. They had bickered over every conceivable and even inconceivable subject. It is impossible to acquit France entirely of all the blame for a situation that played so patently into German hands. The French openly underrated and jeered at the military efforts of Italy during the Great War. Their fostering of the Little Entente was only too plainly intended to constitute part of a policy of reinsurance against Italy. They had in September 1918 denounced two of the three Italo-French Conventions over Tunisia, and, though they renewed the Conventions for periods of three months at a time, they only consented to make a definite new arrangement when Laval went to Rome. They were no less reluctant to settle the problem of the colonial compensation due to Italy from France under Article XIII of the Treaty of London (1915). The settlement, when made, was singularly to the French advantage. France avoided that separation of her possessions which would have

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chapters Two and Five.

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entitled Italy to infiltrate into the centre of Africa, and the territory to be ceded merely added to Signor Mussolini's collection of deserts. The French had resisted stubbornly the Italian demands for naval parity. They cordially disliked and distrusted any schemes allowing Germany an agreed measure of rearmament. Not that France was by any means without considerable justification for her intransigence. She was scornfully described as utterly effete and a *vieille carcasse*. Unending jibes were levelled at the "immortal principles" of the French Revolution. Italy was constantly attacking France because she harboured many *fuorusciti*, i.e. anti-Fascist political refugees, and on several occasions did not scruple to procure their assassination on French soil. Small wonder, then, if the two Latin countries, having, as it were, married at leisure, repented in haste. If France was, on the whole, thought to be less responsible than Great Britain for "sanctions", she was a close second, and she was regarded as Italy's most embittered adversary over the Spanish Civil War. It was France who proposed the Conference for the suppression of piracy in the Mediterranean which led to the Arrangement of Nyon, and it was she also who took the lead in urging upon Great Britain and Italy the necessity of liquidating the Spanish situation, especially by the recall of all "volunteers".

Anybody, then, who had remarked how seldom Signor Mussolini made himself gracious simultaneously to both Great Britain and France; how, on the contrary, he exploited his good relations of the moment with the one to be cantankerous with the other, must have received with scepticism the announcement that a Franco-Italian Agreement similar to the Anglo-Italian Agreement was to be concluded. France was, however, sufficiently optimistic to take the initiative on April 16th, on the very day, that is, when Lord Perth and Count Ciano had signed their Agreement. Signor Mussolini soon showed his cloven hoof. A few days after Herr Hitler had concluded his visit to Rome,<sup>1</sup> Signor Mussolini made a speech in Genoa in which, referring to the negotiations, he said, "I do not know whether we shall reach an agreement because, in a matter of extreme actuality, that is the war in Spain, we are on opposite sides of the barricades". In spite of this ominous damper and many untoward developments the negotiations went on until Italy thought that she might stampede France into granting concessions which were coming to be demanded with growing insistency by her more perfervid publicists. A little comedy was accordingly staged on the usual lines in the Chamber of Deputies on

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Two.

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the last day of November. At a carefully pre-arranged moment of the speech which Count Ciano was delivering the well-drilled Deputies, headed by Signor Farinacci, a former Secretary of the Fascist Party, and by Signor Starace, who then held that post, rose from their benches and, erupting into a "spontaneous" demonstration under the eyes of the newly-arrived French Ambassador, M. François-Poncet, raised excited shouts of "Tunisia", "Corsica", "Nice" and "Jibuti". The Deputies then marched in a vociferous procession to the Palazzo Venezia where Signor Mussolini, who was of course awaiting them, acknowledged the demonstration by appearing on the balcony. The Press broke out into a tornado of anti-French irredentist propaganda, and shortly afterwards the Fascist Government, as the faithful interpreter of the national aspirations, sent France a Note in which it denounced the Laval-Mussolini Agreement and summoned France to submit new proposals for satisfying Italy's claims under the Treaty of London. The official French reply traversing the Italian thesis but none the less accepting the reversion of relations to the *status quo ante* January 1935 was delivered in Rome on December 26th. Immediately afterwards M. Daladier, then Prime Minister, visited Corsica and Tunisia where he was enthusiastically acclaimed. Having failed to "noble" Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax during their visit to Rome,<sup>2</sup> Signor Mussolini next proceeded to give to the airy nothing of Italian aspirations a more concrete, if still not formally official local habitation and a name. Speaking on March 26th, 1939, he declared that the Italian problems to be settled with France could be defined as Tunisia, Jibuti and the Suez Canal. In not one of these three cases had Italy any legal claim to ownership, and such moral claims as she had to a measure of preferential treatment postulated disregard for the strict letter of the Tenth Commandment.

Five months after Italy's entry into the war Signor Mussolini had the effrontery to disregard completely the overtures made by France in April 1938 and to say that Italy's more than rightful claims

"might have become the subject of discussions before the war if the ridiculous and tragic word '*j'aurais*' had not opposed them. When a hint was given that this ridiculous and tragic word would be removed<sup>3</sup> it was too late. Italy had chosen her way ever since 1939; the die was cast!"

There is no reason to quarrel with this statement. Whatever may have

<sup>1</sup> December 17th, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> January 11th-14th, 1939.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Five.

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been the immediate motive for Italy's final decision to conclude an alliance with Germany <sup>1</sup> there can be no reasonable doubt that, when once the instrument was signed, all hope of bringing Signor Mussolini back into the Allied camp was irretrievably lost. On re-reading a pretty full diary which I kept in Rome during 1939-40 I have been astonished to find how hard this hope died in some quarters. The French in particular were incorrigibly optimistic. If, perhaps, not many of these optimists believed that Signor Mussolini would emulate Dick Whittington, there was a strong tendency to think in face of all the evidence to the contrary <sup>2</sup> that Italy would remain non-belligerent to the last. M. Reynaud himself seems to have been surprised by Italy's declaration of war. Such, at least, was the impression derived from the indignant broadcast delivered by him a few hours afterwards. If his surprise was genuine he must have been singularly ill-informed from the Palazzo Farnese.

It may be granted that, if the Allies had managed fairly to hold Germany in the West and had given her as good as they got, Signor Mussolini would in all probability have maintained his position as a non-belligerent. As Count Ciano was to reveal to the Chamber of Deputies <sup>3</sup> Italy was not ready for war and had demanded three years in which to complete her preparations. If, then, Great Britain and France had managed to stem the German onslaught, their chances of defeating the Nazis before Italy was ready to take the field against two such obviously powerful armies would have been considerable. Signor Mussolini would, in all the circumstances, have been justified in remaining non-belligerent. And, to give the Devil his due, much more could not have been expected of him. But to caress the notion of his passing over into the opposite camp and fighting against his confederate was to expect too much of a man with even Signor Mussolini's record of bad faith. That he was fundamentally hostile to the Allies was made clear from another passage in this same speech by Count Ciano, which disclosed the cavalier treatment meted out to Italy by Germany within three months after the signature of their alliance. Although, said the Italian Foreign Minister, "conflict was already in the air" when he went to Salzburg in the middle of August to meet Herren Hitler and von Ribbentrop, nevertheless the Polish question had been "very far from having assumed that bitterness which at a certain moment rendered it

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Two and Appendix One.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>3</sup> On December 16th, 1939. See Chapter Four.

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insoluble on peaceful lines" when the Italo-German Treaty was concluded. In other words Count Ciano virtually said that in signing the Alliance Italy did not expect or undertake to give military support to Germany if she went to war at once with Poland. Although, then, the situation was recognized to have become "extremely compromised" it was still thought worth while to make another attempt at Salzburg to prevent war. But Germany turned a deaf ear. Count Ciano was informed at great length of the

"reasons for which Germany could no longer afford to face the delays and postponement of diplomatic negotiations conducted by an adversary who had given proofs of bad will towards a fair solution. The incidents which were multiplying every hour had—in the judgment of the Government of the Reich—shifted the dispute from diplomatic on to military ground. Hence, from the Salzburg conversations onwards it appeared clear that, unless there were a radical change in the Polish attitude, a solution by arms was the more likely. But there was also clearly manifest the wish of Hitler to restrict the conflict within its limited bounds of a bilateral dispute between Germany and Poland, and to avoid in every way the possibility that the fire from this dispute might spread and the crisis become general. For our part, we did not fail from that time onwards to intimate to the Government of the Reich the reasons—already well known to them—for which the Fascist Government would have preferred a peaceful solution of the dispute, or at least, if that were impossible, a strict localization of the conflict."

Nothing could have been put more bluntly in diplomatic language. Correctly informed by Count Grandi, who had just left London, that Great Britain and France would espouse the Polish cause with arms, Count Ciano found his warnings disbelieved and his ally bent upon war. Nor was he only disbelieved; he was also tricked. As early as April Italy and Germany had discussed a more supple policy towards the U.S.S.R. with the object of "neutralizing" the Soviets and preventing them from "joining in the system of encirclement projected by the great Democracies". Given, however, the "fundamental attitude of enmity always maintained by Nazi Germany towards Russia", Italy did not foresee anything beyond a long-range flirtation, and Count Ciano was apparently not greatly impressed when he was informed at Salzburg that the commercial negotiations conducted in Moscow had progressed so favourably as to arouse hopes of wider developments. But a week later, at 10 P.M. of the evening of August 21st, as Count

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Ciano pointed out with careful precision, he was told on the telephone that Herr von Ribbentrop would go to Moscow on the 23rd to sign a Pact of non-aggression between the Reich and the U.S.S.R. Since the information was published in the Press on the morning of the 22nd it was made clear that Germany regarded a few hours' notice of a *fait accompli* as sufficient to discharge her obligation to consult her ally. It is small wonder that this revelation by Count Ciano was received with a gasp of astonishment by the Chamber. Small wonder, too, that when after September 1st people ignorant of the facts whispered about Italy having again left her ally in the lurch, Signor Mussolini had shown himself as touchy as was Cyrano de Bergerac on the topic of noses. But after Count Ciano's speech no such reproach could be levelled at the Italian Dictator. Count Ciano's speech, which was a very long and documented, but often weak and highly tendentious apology for Fascist foreign policy, mingled with its bitter denunciations of Great Britain and France much very outspoken and damning evidence against Germany. Count Ciano was obviously at pains to clear Italy of the charge of not having fulfilled her obligations, and he demonstrated with unanswerable clarity that Germany had (a) gone back upon her anti-Comintern policy; (b) had not consulted her new ally about this change of front; (c) had disbelieved Italy's warnings that Great Britain and France would take up arms for Poland; and (d) had disregarded Italy's demand for a period of three years in which to make preparations for war. It was, then, Herr Hitler who, by eating all his words about the iniquities of Bolshevism and by stultifying the purpose of the anti-Comintern Pact, had let down Signor Mussolini, not Signor Mussolini who had failed his ally. The wonder rather was that Signor Mussolini should have swallowed this insulting treatment. Italy's declaration of her non-belligerency was more than Herr Hitler had any juridical right to expect. That, nevertheless, both the Fascist Grand Council<sup>1</sup> and Count Ciano should have subsequently defined Italo-German relations as remaining exactly as they were established by the Pact of Alliance and by the exchange of views held before and afterwards at Milan, Salzburg and Berlin proved beyond doubt how wide an abyss now yawned between Fascist Italy and her former Allies of the Four Years' War, and how eager Signor Mussolini was to attack them as soon as ever he could and dared. There was the utmost significance in the telegram<sup>2</sup> in which Herr Hitler, after thanking

<sup>1</sup> Meeting of December 7th-8th, 1939.

<sup>2</sup> September 1st, 1939.

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Signor Mussolini for his recent diplomatic and political support, and declaring that in the existing circumstances he had no need of Italian military aid, concluded, "I thank you also, Duce, for everything which you will do for the common cause of Fascism and of National Socialism". No warning could have been clearer.

## Chapter Two

### THE ROME-BERLIN AXIS

ACCORDING to Signor Mussolini the friendship that took form in the Rome-Berlin Axis was born in the autumn of 1935. If it be admitted that the period of human gestation does not apply to political creations, it is possible to reconcile the statement with the view that the moment of unconscious conception occurred during the Stresa Conference of the preceding April. Italy had already been involved for several months in the opening stages of her quarrel with Abyssinia, and suspicions had found their way into the Swiss Press that Abyssinia would finally have to pay the costs of the Laval-Mussolini Agreements concluded in the opening week of the year. That there had been some idea of threshing out the Abyssinian problem was evident from the presence in Stresa of a British and of an Italian expert. Unfortunately, however, the opportunity was let slip—if indeed it would not be more correct to say that the British and French delegates, obsessed by the German repudiation of the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles, and anxious at all costs to obtain a united triple front, turned a deliberately deaf ear to those of their advisers who pleaded for a discussion of a dispute already recognized to be dangerous. It is quite obvious from Marshal De Bono's book <sup>1</sup> on the early stages of the war and also from the remarks of Count Ciano <sup>2</sup> that Italy had already decided to grab what she could in Abyssinia. It is, however, not impossible that some deal might have been done at Stresa which would have given Italy substantial satisfaction; have saved the face, and even the life of the League of Nations; and have rendered unnecessary the application of those milk-and-water "sanctions" which did Italy no real harm, helped enormously to popularize a campaign for which at the outset there was no enthusiasm, and enabled Italy to boast that she had snapped her fingers at the British Fleet and at a coalition of the world bent on starving her people to death.

The Italo-German *rapprochement* was at the outset of dubious vitality. The first meeting in Venice in 1934 between Signor Mussolini and Herr Hitler had been a complete fiasco, ending in a misunder-

<sup>1</sup> *La Preparazione e le prime operazioni.*

<sup>2</sup> Speech of December 16th, 1939.



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standing over Austria which made matters worse rather than better. The murder shortly afterwards of Herr Dollfuss had led to an explosion of rage and even obscene abuse of Germans in the Italian Press. The Laval-Mussolini Agreements<sup>1</sup> had contained the clearest warnings to Germany against unilateral violations of treaty engagements. Similar warnings had been given during the following Anglo-French conversations, at the Stresa Conference and at Geneva. Up till the spring, then, of 1935 Italy had not ostensibly wandered from the fold beyond call. But during the summer the activity of Mr. Eden in seeking to mobilize the opinion of the League against Italy's obviously impending aggression, coupled with the Anglo-German naval understanding, provoked an outburst of Italian rage, and the Stresa front was proclaimed to have been broken by British egoism. The imposition of "sanctions", largely on the initiative of Mr. Eden, deepened the incipient estrangement of the two countries. When Germany ostentatiously refrained from associating herself with the policy of the League, that she was on the point of quitting, the Rome-Berlin axis was born. The crowings of the new baby were soon heard. Already in February 1936 strong hints were being dropped in Rome that the maintenance of "sanctions" might be utilized as a pretext for Italy's not committing herself over the naval discussions then being held in London, and the same cause underlay Italy's growing sympathy towards the German condemnation of the Franco-Soviet Pact as incompatible with the Treaty of Locarno. It was already being suggested, moreover, that Italy would not join in any action by Great Britain and France if Germany were to violate her undertakings in the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland. Italy, in short, was trying to kill "sanctions" by sulking and refusing to "play ball". Although, then, many responsible Italians were disagreeably perturbed when Herr Hitler sent his troops into the Rhineland and repudiated the Treaty of Locarno, which was rightly considered to be particularly binding upon him after his repeated declarations to that effect, Signor Mussolini decided not to commit himself too far. Italy signed the memorandum bidding Germany halt her military steps in the Rhineland and submit her case to the International Court at the Hague, but she did not join in the meetings of the British, French and Belgian General Staffs, and she threw out reminders that she was not so directly concerned as were France and Belgium—or even Great Britain since Mr. (now Earl) Baldwin had placed the British frontier on the Rhine. Italy's attitude towards current political problems

<sup>1</sup> January 1935.

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interesting the Great Powers was summed up as "technical collaboration and liberty of political action".

The repeal of "sanctions" was ungraciously accepted as only a bare act of justice, the motive for which was not so much a desire to repair the "iniquitous verdict" pronounced against Italy during the preceding autumn as an acknowledgement of failure, and it was intimated that Italy's full collaboration must depend upon the denunciation of the naval agreements concluded during the era of "sanctions" between Great Britain and the smaller Mediterranean countries. When, then, Belgium invited Italy to attend a preparatory meeting of the Locarno Powers in Brussels, Italy replied <sup>1</sup> that, while she was ready to make a concrete contribution towards the guaranteeing of peace, she felt compelled to take account of the existence of certain Mediterranean undertakings which hindered her participation in the work of international cooperation that she eagerly desired. Italy further expressed the opinion that it was advisable to invite Germany also to the proposed meeting, since the absence of one of the States which signed the Treaty of Locarno would complicate rather than clarify the existing situation. These last words were immediately interpreted as a pendant to an Austro-German "settlement" just concluded, and welcomed in Rome as removing the main stumbling-block to Italo-German cordiality and one of the most dangerous threats to European equilibrium and peace.

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War cemented the Italo-German *rapprochement*. The parallelism between the policy of the two countries became more and more evident, and in the second half of October 1936 Count Ciano visited Berlin and afterwards saw Herr Hitler at Berchtesgaden. The official statement issued at the close of the visit announced that the questions of the day of a political, economic and social order had been examined; that the conversations had been marked by "friendly cordiality"; and that the two Governments had agreed to develop a common line of action in the general interests of peace and reconstruction, and to this end would remain in contact. Amplifying the official statement Count Ciano announced to the Press that the negotiations for a new treaty of Locarno had been reviewed. So also had certain aspects of the problem of the League of Nations. Questions arising in the Danubian basin would be treated in a spirit of friendly cooperation. At the time there was a sharp division of opinion about the practical outcome of Count Ciano's visit. The formal recognition

<sup>1</sup> July 11th, 1936.

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by Germany of the Italian Empire in Abyssinia did not materially affect the *de facto* situation, but it gave much pleasure to Italy, who responded by extending to German economic interests in Abyssinia the commercial treaty concluded between Italy and Germany. But, if this recognition of Italy's new Empire was, outwardly, the only concrete result of Count Ciano's visit it is now clear that much more was accomplished. Italy identified herself more closely with the anti-Bolshevist policy of Herr Hitler. It was decided to give recognition at an early date to the Government of General Franco in Spain. Not only did Italy assent to Herr Hitler's thesis that the Franco-Soviet Pact was deliberately aimed against Germany but she showed an inclination to see in it also a possible threat to herself. She evinced suspicion of any connexion between a new treaty of Locarno and the League, and she maintained that she could not become a co-guarantor with Great Britain until that country had cleared up her military and political intentions towards Italy. Hence Italy and Germany were found to be at one in excluding all new elements and in wishing to remain on the bases of 1925, simplified and brought up to date. To both parties the meeting was highly satisfactory. Germany's fear of a possible reconstruction of the Stresa front was allayed, while Italy was reassured that there was no solid foundation to the suggestion of an Anglo-Franco-German Pact that would leave Italy isolated in the Mediterranean.

Signor Mussolini's speech in Milan on November 1st, 1936, drew the bonds still closer and gave to Italo-German relations an official definition as an "axis". Count Ciano's visit to Berlin, he said, had resulted in an understanding on determined problems, some of which were particularly burning at the moment. These understandings had been duly recorded in signed instruments, but the line Berlin-Rome was "not a diaphragm, but rather an axis round which all those European States animated by desire of collaboration and peace can cooperate". Such a suggestion in itself served to show how intimate the ties between the two countries had become. Nor were these ties in any way weakened by the conclusion of the so-called "Gentlemen's Agreement" between Great Britain and Italy,<sup>1</sup> by which it was sought to reconcile British and Italian interests in the Mediterranean. When Marshal (then General) Goering visited Rome a few days later he was assured that the Agreement would not in any way affect the understanding between Rome and Berlin or modify the policy of the Fascist Government.

<sup>1</sup> January 2nd, 1937.

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His visit was said to have confirmed the identity of views between the Italian and German Governments on the outstanding European problems and on the necessity of maintaining a common attitude towards developments in the Spanish Civil War. Throughout 1937 the intimacy ripened. The former Italian hope of conciliation between Germany and the U.S.S.R. was now pronounced approvingly to have been killed. Any coming together of France and Germany was excluded so long as the Franco-Soviet Pact was in force. German claims for the restoration of her colonies were supported with increasing strength. A meeting in Venice<sup>1</sup> between Signor Mussolini and Herr von Schuschnigg left the impression that Italy was resigning herself to an eventual union between Austria and Germany. When at the end of September Signor Mussolini visited Herr Hitler and made a speech on the May Field,<sup>2</sup> he dwelt upon the identical aims of the Fascist and Nazi Revolutions. Both sought the unity and greatness of their peoples. Both had everywhere the same enemies serving the same master—the Third International. Both believed in will as the force determining the life of the people. Both exalted the dignity of labour. Both trusted in youth, endowed with the virtues of discipline, courage, patriotism and contempt for the easy existence. The Axis, born in the autumn of 1935, had “worked magnificently for an ever greater *rapprochement* between our two peoples and for a more effective policy of European peace”. No other regimes in the world, Signor Mussolini had the effrontery to claim, were so truly democratic and popular as those set up in Germany and Italy. To a world anxious to know what would come out of the visit, peace or war, “the Führer and I can reply together with loud voices, ‘Peace’”. A few weeks later<sup>3</sup> Italy was admitted as an original signatory to the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact, concluded twelve months before. Her resignation from the League shortly afterwards was almost automatic. She could hardly belong simultaneously to two such antagonistic systems.

The annexation of Austria by Germany in March 1938 put a severe strain upon the friends. For a moment it looked as though the Axis would snap. Herr Hitler’s personal letter to Signor Mussolini, however, assuring him that ever since the Great War he had regarded the Brenner as Italy’s definite frontier and that Italy could continue to rely on German friendship, turned the scales. A French invitation to Italy to participate in concerted action against Germany was rejected on the

<sup>1</sup> April 22nd–23rd, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> September 28th, 1937.

<sup>3</sup> November 6th, 1937.

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score that "it would have been groundless and purposeless and would merely have rendered the international situation more difficult". Herr Hitler breathed again, and sent Signor Mussolini a telegram saying "I shall never forget this". Signor Mussolini is reported to have exclaimed "*Nemmeno io*" (nor shall I), but he acknowledged it publicly by replying "My attitude is determined by the friendship between our two countries which is consecrated in the Axis". After that all was more or less plain sailing. It was suddenly discovered that Signor Mussolini (who in those days was always right) had always regarded the *Anschluss* as eventually inevitable—even when he sent troops to the Austrian border after the brutal murder of his *protégé* Herr Dollfuss—, that Italy had nothing to fear from it, and that in any case the real culprits were Great Britain and France who, having tried to throttle Italy with "sanctions", had, as they thought, left her isolated. The enemies of Fascism had found this a good opportunity for setting the two totalitarian States at loggerheads. This hope, Signor Mussolini told the Chamber of Deputies, was a reproach to the political intelligence of the Italian people. In point of fact this crisis had served to test the trustworthiness of the Axis, and now the Germans knew that it was an instrument which would serve not only for normal occasions, but also for the exceptional moments in history. Thus the road was clear for Herr Hitler's return visit.<sup>1</sup> King Victor Emmanuel, the armed forces, everybody and everything was mobilized to welcome the visitor with a wealth of display and pageantry in an incomparable setting where natural beauty and lofty tradition went hand in hand with the achievements of the Fascist Revolution. The most interesting passage in any of the speeches was that in which Herr Hitler, after acknowledging "those natural frontiers which Providence and history have visibly drawn between our two peoples" on the Alps, went on to say that these boundaries would "give Italy and Germany not only the possibility of peaceful and permanent collaboration through a clear division of their spheres of activity, but will provide a bridge for mutual help and support". These were words into which much might be read. The recent conclusion<sup>2</sup> of the second and more far-reaching Anglo-Italian Agreement served, however momentarily, to prevent any insuperable barrier being set up between the Powers of the London-Paris and the Rome-Berlin Axes. At the same time it was evident that the Rome-Berlin Axis had now become the corner-stone of Italian foreign policy, and French failure to recognize this fact, coupled with

<sup>1</sup> May 3rd-9th, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> April 16th, 1938.

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conflicting views on Spain, soon destroyed any hopes of an understanding between France and Italy.

Herr Hitler's visit to Italy, however, had had another very important result, in so far as it determined the Italian attitude towards the Czech problem, now entering an acute stage. Herr Conrad Henlein had formulated at Carlsbad<sup>1</sup> eight points embodying the demands of the Sudetenland Germans of Czechoslovakia. Throughout the negotiations Italy, while giving her support to Germany, had appeared anxious to hold aloof from the dispute. When, however, in the early days of September, Herr Hitler, pursuing his familiar tactics, declared in Nürnberg that the Sudeten Germans must be allowed to exercise the right of self-determination and promised them the support of the Reich, Italy swung over completely to the German thesis. Whereas it had been stressed that Herr Henlein's proposals, demanding territorial autonomy for the minorities, had never suggested separation pure and simple from the Czechoslovak State, it was now suddenly discovered in Rome that

"Henceforth there are only two possible solutions. The first is to give the Sudeten Germans the means to determine their own future; the other is to deny them that right. To give the Sudetenland the possibility of seceding from Prague is to choose the path of justice and peace. The other solution is that of confusion and war."

In an open letter to Lord Runciman<sup>2</sup> Signor Mussolini declared that the moment for compromises was past. A totalitarian solution was imperative, and it must be imposed from outside by those same Powers which were responsible for the creation of this hybrid State.

After the inconclusive outcome to Mr. Chamberlain's spectacular flight to Munich Signor Mussolini toured north-eastern Italy, making speeches in which optimism, scepticism and bombast were mingled, but which were all designed to flog a reluctant public into accepting his determination to side with Germany in the event of a European conflict. When, however, the storm-clouds really threatened to burst at the end of September Signor Mussolini, well aware of Italy's unpreparedness for war, lent an ear to Mr. Chamberlain's appeal that he should use his influence for peace with Herr Hitler. The settlement reached at Munich was a humiliating defeat for Great Britain and France, though the Italian Press pretended to overlook this in their

<sup>1</sup> March 24th, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> Engaged in an unofficial official mission of inquiry and conciliation.

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anxiety to foster the belief that Signor Mussolini as a *deus ex machina* had created a new spirit of confidence between the four Great Powers from which a greater measure of international collaboration might henceforward be expected. There were a few encouraging minor tokens. France recognized the Italian Empire. An effort was made to hasten the ratification of the Anglo-Italian Agreement. Ten thousand Italian Legionaries were withdrawn from Spain. But, though Signor Mussolini professed to see a break in the clouds and relations with Great Britain were improved by the official recognition of Italy's African Empire and by the ratification of the Anglo-Italian Agreement,<sup>1</sup> the political barometer was anything but steady. Complaints were soon heard that Great Britain and France were devoting inordinate attention to military discussions, that no change in the British or French attitude towards the Spanish Civil War was visible; that little heed was being paid to the question of colonies which Italy regarded as a problem of equilibrium, justice and order, and therefore of interest not only to Germany but also to herself—despite all the talk in 1936 of Italy now being a "satisfied" Power. Italy showed her hand when, during a speech by Count Ciano,<sup>2</sup> references to the interests and natural aspirations of the Italian people were greeted by Deputies and organized cheer-leaders in the galleries with shouts of "Tunisia", "Nice" and "Corsica". The speech, the carefully-staged demonstration and the comments in the Press all went to show that the Anglo-Italian Agreement was of scant value, and that the Italians had come away from Munich with the notion that, if Great Britain and France did not achieve "European solidarity" on the lines desired by Rome and Berlin, then the Axis would impose it. Italian attacks were mainly levelled against France, who was accused of not having implemented the Laval-Mussolini Accords—declared in consequence to be no longer valid.<sup>3</sup> The exchange of notes between Italy and France on the denunciation of the 1935 Agreement gave rise to a protracted Press campaign in both countries, but Italian hopes that Mr. Chamberlain would, during his official visit to Rome in January 1939, act as the *porte-parole* of the Quai d'Orsay, were doomed to disappointment. The exact scope of Italy's "natural aspirations" seems to have been one of the various thorny questions which, if touched upon, were not discussed in detail, and Mr. Chamberlain left Signor Mussolini in no

<sup>1</sup> November 16th, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> November 30th, 1938. See Chapter One.

<sup>3</sup> Note of December 17th, 1938; Chapter One.

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doubt that the ties between Great Britain and France were not limited to mere legal forms.

The final disruption of Czechoslovakia in March was another unpleasant pill which Italy had to swallow with the best grace possible. The Italian Press, of course, was compelled to find excuses for the dismemberment of that unhappy Republic, but the average Italian was seriously concerned at Herr Hitler's growing appetite and at this fresh proof that no trust could be placed in his word. Italian public opinion was not deceived when the Fascist Grand Council reaffirmed its "full adhesion to the policy of the Rome-Berlin Axis" on the score that developments in central Europe were only the consequence of the Versailles Treaty, and that the authoritarian States were being menaced by a "united front of the Democracies associated with Bolshevism". It became then and later the custom in Italy to pretend that the Democracies alone were to blame if the proper use were not made of the respite obtained at Munich. In support of the allegation that all the offers of the totalitarian Powers to collaborate in the promotion of "peace based on justice"—a stock and favourite phrase—were rejected by the Democracies a finger was pointed at the Anglo-French guarantee to Poland (March 31st);<sup>1</sup> the unilateral guarantees made by Britain and France to Greece and Roumania (April 13th); the opening of negotiations in Moscow (April 8th) between Great Britain, France and the U.S.S.R.; and the Anglo-Turkish Agreement of May 12th. Thus, declared Count Ciano,<sup>2</sup> "day by day were closed all the links of that circle which—according to the intentions of its makers—was destined to complete the blockade of Germany in Eastern Europe and of Italy in the Mediterranean and in the Balkans". Such a presentation of the course of events was a sheer one-sided travesty of the facts. If Great Britain and France began at last resolutely to look to their defences and to consider the formation of a coalition intended to put a stop to further acts of aggression by Germany and Italy, their measures were amply justified by the acts and threats of their adversaries. The twentieth anniversary<sup>3</sup> of the foundation of the Fascist movement was marked by an interchange of world-defying telegrams between Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini. Herr Hitler assured Signor Mussolini that the German people stood beside Italy "against all the manoeuvres of hatred and incomprehension, intended to repress the legitimate will to existence of our two peoples and to endanger the peace of the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>2</sup> December 16th, 1939.

<sup>3</sup> March 23rd, 1939.



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world". Signor Mussolini, not to be outdone, in his turn informed Herr Hitler that the Nazi and Fascist Revolutions were "destined to unhinge the reactionary and conservative positions of the old world and at the same time to eliminate the perils of the Bolshevik ideology. That will happen for the good of our two peoples and for the peaceful development—on new bases—of European civilization." On the same day Signor Mussolini, addressing a rally of his followers, declared that all attempts to unhinge or break the Rome-Berlin Axis were puerile. The Axis was not merely a relationship between two States; it was a meeting between two Revolutions which declared themselves to be in sharp antithesis to all the other conceptions of contemporary civilization—a remark, incidentally, reminiscent of the dear old lady who thought all the regiment was marching out of step except her Willie. Herein was the strength of the Axis, and herein lay the conditions of its permanence. Everything that had happened in central Europe was predestined, and if the Democracies bitterly wept for the loss of their favourite creation (Czechoslovakia) that was the best possible reason not to mingle tears with theirs. If the sought-for constitution of a coalition against the authoritarian regimes came about, these regimes would pick up the gauntlet and would not only defend themselves but pass to the counter-attack in every quarter of the globe. He defined Italy's claims against France<sup>1</sup> under the headings Tunisia, Jibuti, Suez Canal, and, while admitting France's right not to discuss these problems, said he did not want to hear anything more about brotherly, sisterly, cousinly or other bastard relationship, since relations between States were relations based on strength and such relations were the elements determining their policy. Geographically, historically, politically, militarily the Mediterranean was a vital area for Italy, and he naturally included in the Mediterranean the Adriatic, in which sea Italian interests were pre-eminent though not exclusive so far as the Slavs were concerned. He wound up his harangue by calling for more armaments, more guns, more ships and more aeroplanes.

Signor Mussolini's inclusion of the Adriatic in the Mediterranean was meant to justify in advance the Italian occupation of Albania,<sup>2</sup> a flagrant breach of the Anglo-Italian Agreement. Great Britain, however, stooped to pretend that the occupation was not a violation of the Mediterranean *status quo*, with the natural consequence that her conciliatory attitude was repaid by an outburst of cock-a-hoop bluster

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>2</sup> On Good Friday, April 7th, 1939.

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and bravado in the newspapers, and Signor Mussolini was emboldened to declare<sup>1</sup> that

“Towards friendly peoples we shall move with the attitude of a friend; against hostile peoples we shall show a clear and resolute attitude of hostility. . . . The world must in any case know that to-morrow, as yesterday, as always we shall go straight ahead.”

The British adoption of the system of compulsory military training at the end of April was immediately pooh-poohed in the Italian Press as unlikely to impress or frighten anybody, and at the same time the return to Berlin of the British Ambassador, Sir Nevile Henderson, was explained as proof that the British Government had recognized the failure of their policy of “encirclement”. The magnetic attraction of the Axis for the other countries had, it was alleged, been too strong for British blandishments, and the totalitarian Powers enjoyed in the world an impregnable position. The dismissal at the beginning of May of M. Litvinoff from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was at once interpreted in Rome as a blow to the Anglo-French negotiations in Moscow. Herr Hitler’s denunciation<sup>2</sup> of his treaties with Great Britain and Poland was judged in Rome<sup>3</sup> to render the prospect of war more likely. To pretend, therefore, that the two partners of the Axis were innocent lambs threatened by the imperialist Democracies with the personal encouragement of President Roosevelt was arrant bunkum. The pretence, however, was steadily upheld, and a meeting was held in Milan between Count Ciano and Herr von Ribbentrop on May 6th and 7th which was ostensibly organized with the object of presenting a united front against “encirclement” and which was the forerunner to the Treaty of Alliance signed in Berlin on the 22nd. Two days before the signature of that instrument Signor Mussolini gave tongue at Cuneo. He declared that when the Alliance had been concluded there would be formed a block of 150 million men, against which nothing could be done. This block wanted peace but was prepared to impose it if the great Democracies, which were Conservative and reactionary, attempted to halt its irresistible march. Henceforth, he concluded, he would keep silence. “In case of necessity the people will speak.” This speech was described by Signor Mussolini as an appendix to the speech he had delivered in Turin<sup>4</sup> in which he had interpolated amongst the customary jibes at the Democracies the

<sup>1</sup> April 13th, 1939.

<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, April 29th, 1939.

<sup>2</sup> April 28th, 1939.

<sup>4</sup> May 14th, 1939.

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remark that there were not at that moment in Europe questions of such magnitude and acuteness as to justify a war. The date of this acknowledgement is worth bearing in mind.

The treaty signed in Berlin consisted of a preamble and seven clauses.<sup>1</sup> This close military alliance, it was declared, menaced nobody, because in its negotiation and conclusion the two Governments had in mind the maintenance of European peace, and, on the other hand, were only putting their relations on the same basis as that on which Anglo-French relations had rested for some time. Italy and Germany could not, therefore, be held responsible for having split Europe into two opposing blocks, and the Treaty, so far from being an instrument of menace, was only a reply to those who wanted to menace them. Curiously enough it was Count Grandi, then Italian Ambassador in London, who was put up to make the most vigorous and uncompromising comments. Speaking at a reception in the Embassy in Grosvenor Square at which the principal guests were the staff of the German Embassy and the leading members of the German colony in London, Count Grandi declared that the two nations would march to defend with their inflexible resolution and the invincible might of their arms their rights to progress and existence. He stressed the "profound significance and decisive importance" of the Treaty. He declared that twenty years of presumptuous injustice and blind refusal to look facts in the face had taught the Italians who were their real enemies. "Sanctions" had been in fact "a real war to strangle Italy and her future as a nation", but now the new Treaty "opened for Europe and the world an era of just peace, and for the two great Fascist nations a new cycle of greater and more dazzling victories". After this astounding outburst of impertinence and gross abuse of his extra-territorial privileges by a man who had always been well received and popular in England, Count Grandi soon afterwards vacated his post. He may consider himself lucky that he was not sent packing, as he so richly deserved to be.

Henceforward developments raced ahead at increasing speed. The return of the Italian troops from Spain and the presence in Rome of Señor Serrano Suñer enabled Signor Mussolini to boast openly<sup>2</sup> that "we did not hesitate to give our full aid openly from the first days right up to the final victory"—as brazen an admission as the revelations made by Marshal De Bono about the preparations for the Abyssinian War. Britain and France were depicted as burning with war fever and resolutely averse from all negotiations. The increasingly strained relations

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix One.

<sup>2</sup> June 8th, 1939.

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between Poland and Germany over Danzig were imputed to the "blank cheque" given to Poland by the Allies, and the bare notion that there could be two sides to the questions now dividing the European Powers was scouted. When Count Ciano went to Salzburg<sup>1</sup> to meet Herr Hitler and Herr von Ribbentrop he found them determined on war, though apparently anxious that the conflict should be confined to Germany and Poland. Italy, as Count Ciano later revealed, made clear at the time why she preferred a peaceful solution of the dispute,<sup>2</sup> and Signor Mussolini busied himself to put matters upon a "realistic basis". This "realism", as it appeared, took the form of suggestions that Danzig should be ceded to Germany out of hand as a gesture and acknowledgement of Germany's right, and that ulterior negotiations might then be conducted in an atmosphere of confidence and goodwill!! Then came the bombshell of the German volte-face towards Russia and of the conclusion of the Russo-German Pact. What a staggering blow that was to Italy who had always preached anti-Bolshevism has been described above.<sup>3</sup> A bold face, however, was assumed, and the Allies were unmercifully taunted with having been completely duped. Meanwhile the sands were running out. There were appeals for peace from the Pope and President Roosevelt, and Signor Mussolini made proposals for the calling of an international conference. But the time was too short. The first overt acts of hostility had occurred, and Herr Hitler declined to withdraw behind his own frontiers before negotiations were opened. On September 1st war was formally begun, and Italy took up the position of non-belligerency which was declared to be strictly consonant with her obligations under the Treaty of Alliance and its collateral undertakings.

<sup>1</sup> August 11th, 12th, 13th, 1939.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter One.

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ITALY'S declaration on September 1st, 1939, of her non-belligerency, as distinct from neutrality, introduced a conception hitherto unknown to International Law. On the showing of the Italians themselves<sup>1</sup> there is not in modern International Law room for any juridical status intermediate between those of neutrality and belligerency. Inasmuch, then, as Italy had coined this new conception and term but had abstained from proffering any official definition of what she meant, the world was reduced to drawing conclusions from her conduct and from unofficial interpretations. These were speedily forthcoming. When the Cabinet's decision was first learned it was hastily supposed that, as in August 1914, Italy had again proclaimed her neutrality. This popular misconception was quickly corrected. The Italian standpoint was authoritatively proclaimed<sup>2</sup> to be a logical corollary of a policy which for many years had struggled against the whole system of "Versailles". This policy was declared to have been adopted and developed by Italy originally on the basis of her own conceptions and by her own methods, and there was no reason why Italy should not continue it in accordance with her own sense of justice and with her own methods. On this account, Italy was said to be assuming

"an attitude of her own, a position of her own, in which there are an implicit judgment and line of action. That is the reason why we do not speak of neutrality. A neutral is a person who is a mere onlooker, because his own interests are not at stake and because the struggle does not concern him. On the contrary this struggle concerns us closely both for its motives and for the stake that is being played for, and our interests in it are or may be involved. It is not the case that there is nothing to be said by us in this struggle; we reserve the right to say our word at the opportune moment, in our own language and in our own style. We only, and for the time being, 'are not initiating military operations'. Thus we are masters

<sup>1</sup> See article on "Neutralità" in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*; also a closely reasoned article in the *Osservatore Romano*, September 7th, 1939.

<sup>2</sup> Article printed on September 15th, 1939, in *Critica Fascista*, the fortnightly review edited by Signor Giuseppe Bottai, one of the most contemplative leaders and theoreticians of the Fascist Party.

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of the situation. This tragic European turmoil is before our eyes. We watch with cold calm and mature our determination."

Another definition of the Italian attitude was provided by Germany. Writing in the Hamburg periodical *Die Aktion*<sup>1</sup> an article entitled "Italy Non-belligerent", Herr Walter Wüster, of the German Foreign Office, pointed out that

"It was reserved to the Fascist régime to coin in the present conflict a new concept which hitherto was not in use in a state of war, 'non-belligerency'; a concept which it is not easy to render in German and which indicates approximately the position of a State which does not participate directly in a war but which, nevertheless, has already decided on which side to range itself."

After explaining as best he could why "our Italian friends" had not marched beside the German troops fighting against Poland and France, and after giving a summary of Italian foreign policy and its objectives, Herr Wüster concluded:

"This is Fascist Italy, the Italy of Mussolini which to-day stands with its arms ready and awaits the moment to act. Fascism by formulating the thought of Empire has cancelled the fatal differences of the past between the Royal House, the Government and the Army, and has solved the problem of the central command. Benito Mussolini is the absolute master of the policy of his country. In Italy, when the hour arrives, the war will be conducted, under the command of the King Emperor, by a single man: by the Duce of Fascism. And this man knows that, if he commands, Italy will be ready to rise as one man and to march towards the goals to which he points. The world-wide power of England is sinking. The treasures of the earth will in future no longer serve only the interests of the Jewish-masonic plutocracy under the protection of the Union Jack. The young forces of the authoritarian States will create a juster disposition of the world. National-socialist Germany has begun the gigantic struggle against the enemies of the world. Fascist Italy today already stands in spirit at her side. She will choose the moment of concrete action in agreement with her friends: for the enemies of the new Europe that moment will be the most dangerous."

It is perfectly obvious from these two Italian and German definitions that Italy's non-belligerency was understood and intended to be something quite distinct from a state of neutrality. Italy, while remaining

<sup>1</sup> February 1940.

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non-belligerent, none the less remained the ally of Germany in accordance with their Treaty of Alliance as qualified by the political conversations which preceded and succeeded the signature of that instrument at Milan, Salzburg and Berlin. Such, at least, was the official formula, though there were not a few people who believed that even the frank revelations made by Count Ciano<sup>1</sup> did not tell the whole story. It is true that for a certain period the word "Axis" was carefully dropped by the Italian Press—an ostentatious omission that even encouraged some incorrigible optimists and persons little acquainted with Signor Mussolini's vindictive character to imagine that a few blandishments would suffice to bring Italy over to the side of the Allies. That the disappearance, however, of this much-used word did not signify that he was indirectly encouraging the growth of any warmer feeling for Great Britain and France may be seen clearly enough from the following extracts, the reproduction of which at the time in the British Press was, rightly or wrongly, deemed inadvisable.

"Divine England, true god and true people, offers peace to the Axis, and the two Powers of the Axis burst into laughter; then she threatens war, and they laugh louder than ever. Divine England begs for an alliance with the Soviets, and the Soviets show what store they lay by the Divine England by dragging her ambassadors from ante-chamber to ante-chamber for three months, at the same time appearing at the windows of the Kremlin to tell the world that certain meddlers sent from London are striving to surprise, at the servants' entrance, the good faith of Comrade Stalin, in order that he may shed the blood of the workers of Russia in the furtherance of the capitalistic dirty tricks of the western demoplutocrats. Divine England, stripped naked in the persons of 55 of her subjects, amongst whom, O what a joke! there were sure not to be missing the old governess and the clerical commercial traveller (probably in drugs), pricked in her most tender parts by the points of the bayonets of Japanese soldiers on guard over the Concession of Tien Tsin, suffers herself to be summoned to Tokyo, with her pants proudly gripped in her fists, and receives the intimation that she must choose between recognition of the new state of affairs in China or evacuation of the Concession. The Sovereign of the Divine England submits to the rough job of exhibiting himself in America; he resigns himself to being received by the President of the United States with the formula How are you? accompanied by a smack of the open hand upon the royal shoulders (and why not upon the royal paunch?):

<sup>1</sup> December 16th, 1939; see Chapter One.

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scarcely have the hawsers been cast off the vessel in which he is lying exhausted, his right hand aching from the handshakes he has lavished upon hundreds of rascallions and wrapped up in a poultice of vegeto-mineral water, than the newspapers of the country which bestowed upon him the greatest welcomes possible, such as it would bestow upon its dearest idols, Laurel and Hardy, announce that there must be no illusions: the Senate stands for neutrality; as soon as the King has returned home he learns in fact that the American law on neutrality is not to be tampered with.”—BERGERET in the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, July 4th, 1939: i.e. before even the outbreak of war.

“Is a true pacification desired? A pacification such as to render possible a limitation of armaments, economic collaboration, in short a long period of constructive peace? To arrive at this it is necessary for the plutocracies first to win a war: the war against their own arrogance, against their own egoism. They must learn to understand the Italian and German frame of mind; they must have the intelligence also to accept to-day certain inevitable sacrifices in order to prevent a catastrophe to-morrow. In order to have a true peace they must place themselves upon fresh ground. Therefore:—Italy must have Tunisia, Jibuti, Suez. Italian lands (such as Malta) must be Italian. Spanish lands (such as Gibraltar) must be Spanish. Only so will the Mediterranean be a sea truly free, and as such we shall be able to guarantee it to the free passage of the English. Germany must have Danzig and the Corridor; also her colonies. Since the Anglo-French policy of force has compelled Italy and Germany to enter upon a costly armaments race, it is only just that the plutocracies contribute financially to the transition of the Italian and German Economies back to a peace footing. Special accords should be drawn up for the supply to Italy and Germany of the raw materials not at their disposal, without these nations being compelled to drain away their gold reserves. An end must be put to all acts of provocation against the totalitarian States, to all acts of brutality against Italian and German residents abroad. The Jewish problem must be solved by common agreement, by the establishment of the Jews in some country outside Europe which is not Palestine.”—CAMICIA NERA in the *Resto del Carlino*, July 9th, 1939: also before the war.

“An English Review, the *Nineteenth Century*, has thought fit to print the following words:—“The Western Powers must have an armed supremacy over Europe. They must have also a lasting supremacy in the Mediterranean sector. This situation might be realized later, in case Italy cannot be liquidated in the course of the present war.” All right. That is plain speaking. Speaking that



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pleases us, because, as in this instance, it compels Italians to meditate upon the consequences of an English victory, however hypothetical. Somebody in a hurry to reply might retort that, before liquidating Italy, England will have to win the war. The appropriate answer, on the contrary, to all those Englishmen without distinction who speak like Mr. Chamberlain but who conceal the purpose revealed by the Review in question is quite other. It is this: that Fascist Italy will never be called upon to settle accounts with England *later on*, because, being determined to 'protect her own interests with inflexible firmness', she knows very well that these interests of hers will be protected 'when and as the Duce chooses'."—An unsigned note in Signor Mussolini's organ, the *Popolo d' Italia*, December 23rd, 1939. There is good reason to believe that such notes were, if not directly written by Signor Mussolini, immediately inspired by him.

"*Suez—Romance of an Enterprise*: this is the title of a French book issued a few months ago, the author André Kostolany, the publishers Pierre Tisné, Paris, 1939. On page 221 of this book we read: 'Hitherto Great Britain has considered Italy, which is largely dependent upon her good will, as a vassal, in a state of temporary rebellion, but none the less as a vassal; and in these conditions it is not possible that England, yielding to the Italian requests, should put pressure upon France to grant Italy a seat on the board of directors of the Suez Canal Company. All things considered, the concession of one or two seats on the board would not, in itself, be in any way a tragedy. But the world knows what to think of the methods of the totalitarian States, for which reason it is absolutely necessary to consider the implication of such a decision before taking it.' One might exclaim that this is a book written . . . before 'sanctions', which established the exact measure of how far Italy depends upon the good will of England, whereas it has been written, or at least printed recently. Anyhow the ideas of the author, like the plot of his romance, require to be brought up to date. One chapter is missing, but there is no hurry. The chapter in question, if it does not appear with the typographical characters of the publisher Tisné, may well appear with those, equally of lead, with which the Italian people reconquered the Empire."—Unsigned note in the *Popolo d' Italia*, February 4th, 1940.

" 'We are at war'—declares the *News Chronicle*—'and therefore we cannot content ourselves with half measures.' This newspaper speaks frankly. It declares in fact that it is necessary to prevent Germany from obtaining possession of foreign currencies; and to prevent this 'by all possible means'. Therefore, also by means which

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are outside international laws. 'We'—concludes the *News Chronicle*—"have repeatedly proved that we do not intend to cause neutrals any useless annoyance; but the affair of the *Altmark* is a proof that Great Britain is determined to take all measures possible against international gangsterism. Italy cannot expect privileged treatment.' Let us also speak frankly: and let us say that Italy does not accept this filthy morality of useful and useless annoyances, on the basis of which any act of tyranny which unjustly hurts another's interest (in peace as in war) becomes a legal act so long as it may be useful to English interests. Let us say that, to make the world moral, but above all to pacify it, this immoral law, which claims to take away even the air that one breathes, if this suits the brutality of British egoism, must cease. Finally let us say that Italy does not seek for privileged treatment. She has never made such a request. She never will. Nobody has ever begged the Home Fleet not to fire. Its silence has not constituted privileged treatment. If its guns have been silent, they have been silent because it is useful to England that they should be silent. Is that clear?"—Note in the *Popolo d' Italia*, March 8th, 1940.

"What has happened recently to a Milanese firm suffices to illustrate the vexatious badgering practised by the British authorities charged with the issue of 'Navicerts' for Italian merchandise consigned to Italian overseas possessions. The firm had presented documents for the dispatch to Asmara of a quantity of scarfs for *Ascaris* made at Como: but the British Consulate wanted to know what colouring materials had been used in colouring the scarfs, in order to establish that there was no colour of German origin involved. A similar order was given to the same firm with regard to a consignment of 24 cases of brilliantine, since information was desired on the component ingredients in order to ascertain that no German products had been employed. But would you like to know the limit? The same firm had also asked leave to dispatch to Asmara two chests containing 1,000 pairs of white shorts, to which had been added 4 pairs of khaki shorts, the remains of old stock samples. Well, the authorization was refused because there was missing—the certificate of origin of the colours used for dyeing the 4 pairs of khaki shorts! And yet all this is as yet nothing. Strange things have been seen, and are to be seen, of every colour; but the colour of what will be seen—if only you have faith and patience—will cure England for ever of the desire to poke her nose, we do not say into the 4 pairs of shorts above mentioned, but into every other matter concerning other countries, and, in particular, Italy."—Note in the *Popolo d' Italia*, March 13th, 1940. The point of the last two sen-

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tences resides in the threat and dirty pun implicit in the use of the word *colore*.

"Every bayonet in the kidneys of a fleeing Englishman vindicates an infamy suffered by mankind. Can our joy in these days ever be surpassed? Yes. That will come when certain heavy warships leave *mare nostrum* for ever and the Italian flag flies proud and victorious from the highest tower of Italian Malta."—CAMICIA NERA in *Il Resto del Carlino*, May 22nd, 1940.

The list of such scurrilous attacks could be extended without difficulty. The examples given above should suffice to show what garbage was permitted to be slung at Great Britain by the Italian newspapers during the months of Italy's so-called non-belligerency and even before we were at war with Germany. In other respects also the Press was mobilized to spread anti-Allied and pro-German propaganda. Preference was invariably given to the German official statements, the claims made in which were accepted without question and displayed in large headings, while the British and French statements were frequently placed in inconspicuous positions and little or no heed taken of their contents. In fact doubt was often cast upon the truth of the Allied official communications, and insulting comments were frequently added, minimizing any successes which could not be denied and suggesting that the Democracies were incompetent bunglers who had no chance of ultimate victory. Not the faintest appreciation was ever published of the magnificent rear-guard action and evacuation carried out by the British on the beaches of Dunkirk. On the contrary. The words in which Horace had jokingly referred to himself as having run away at Philippi *relicta non bene parmula* were applied to us in earnest with savage, vindictive joy in our discomfiture. We were accused of cowardice and of having left our French allies in the lurch. To such lengths, indeed, did the Italian flunkies of Dr. Goebbels go that they overreached themselves and failed to convince their readers. The best proof of the lack of faith felt by many Italians in their own Fascist Press was the enormous increase in the popularity and circulation of the *Osservatore Romano*. The organ of the Vatican was eagerly bought up every afternoon as fast as it was on sale, and had its printing machines been capable of turning out a larger number of copies an even greater circulation would have been reached. The popularity of the *Osservatore Romano* was all the more striking because, while it displayed a most careful impartiality in its presentation of the daily news, it not infrequently published articles demolishing the tendentious hypotheses

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of the Fascist hacks. Thus it earned the virulent abuse of the Fascist extremists, whose rage so blinded them to any sense of reason or humour that they even alleged that the newspaper was influenced by the Jews!

But all this scurrilous Press propaganda was only one aspect of the way in which Italy interpreted her non-belligerent position. Signor Mussolini set out in September 1939 to play a little game of his own. Bound by alliance to Germany, and realizing that Great Britain and France were very unlikely to declare war upon him since they already had enough upon their hands and by so doing would enable him to whip up some patriotic enthusiasm for an unpopular war, he laid his plans for hunting with the hounds and running with the hare, hoping to reap the advantages but to avoid the disadvantages of neutrality as far as possible and for as long as suited his purpose. This "elegant" solution of his problem, as a chess-player might term it, was highly ingenious. It gave to Italians the comforting sensation that their country was actively pursuing an autonomous and independent policy, and it buoyed them up with the hope that they might stay outside the war, while piling up sufficient military strength to play an important, lucrative and even decisive part in the ultimate peace settlement.

The first thing to do was obviously to build up with all the speed possible reserves of all essential materials, raw and other. Italy was dangerously short, for example, of coal, iron ore, rubber, tin and oil, and it had been calculated in 1936 by Admiral Ranieri Biscia that Italy received 86% of her imports by sea, and that of these sea-borne imports 70% came through the Straits of Gibraltar, 17% through the Suez Canal and 13% through the Dardanelles; under the guns, that is to say, of nations which might soon be enemies. It is not easy to quote full and precise figures of Italy's foreign trade because at the outset of the war her Government put an almost complete stopper upon the publication of statistical information. A certain amount of such information did, however, seep through the Italian and foreign Press and was collated in this country.<sup>1</sup> Shipments of cotton, for example, from the U.S.A., India and Egypt amounted to 68,655 tons in the first four months of the war as compared with 57,745 tons imported by Italy during the corresponding period of 1938, and 19,745 tons were imported in January 1940 as against only 7,930 tons imported in January 1939. The total Italian imports of petroleum and petroleum products in 1938 amounted, according to Italian returns, to 2,648 thousand

<sup>1</sup> See especially *The Economist* of May 18th, 1940.

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tons. In 1939 it was estimated that Italy imported 2,780 thousand tons from the U.S.A., Roumania and Mexico alone, and her total imports from all countries must have been much higher. Moreover the Italian figure for 1938 was believed to exclude petroleum used by the Navy or Air Force, and therefore the true imports may have reached 3 million tons; in 1939 they probably exceeded 3 millions. In view of rationing and a steep rise in the price of petroleum products Italy must have accumulated substantial reserves.

This policy, coupled with the demand for more material from overseas to meet the intensification of industrial activity, brought about an acute shortage of free exchange, especially of dollars, and Italy was forced to draw upon her published gold reserves. At the end of 1937 these amounted to 3,996 million lire. During 1938, when the year's trade deficit was 2,960 million lire, the gold reserve was reduced to the extent of 322 millions. In 1939, when the trade deficit had been reduced to 1,500 million lire, this gap was covered by a sale of gold amounting to 974 million lire, of which almost a third was sent to the U.S.A. in the last three months of the year. Meanwhile the guarantee of stable rates of exchange on import and export transactions was extended as from December 1st, 1939, to countries with which Italy had no clearing agreement, and it was explained that the new guarantee aimed at increasing Italian reserves of foreign exchange by encouraging exports to countries with negotiable currencies. The Ministry of Foreign Exchange and Currency issued a provision whereby Italian capital abroad might be used to purchase raw materials instead of being repatriated as cash. On December 29th, 1939, the same Ministry set up a new department to control and develop export trade. Methods of exchange were to be adopted which, within the framework of existing agreements, would avoid clearing-house payments and the transfer of currency. The export of materials of national importance was to be prohibited.

Italy was quick to step as well as she could into Germany's shoes. Italian shipping companies took over the freight and passenger business between Europe and Latin America which Germany was forced to abandon. Italian shipping was said to be the "only" link between Europe and Argentina, "all other links being paralysed".<sup>1</sup> Italian liners sailed regularly to the U.S.A. during the winter 1939-40 and charged greatly increased fares to cover heavy war insurance and the

<sup>1</sup> *Giornale d' Italia*, September 13th, 1939. This was rubbish, as we had ships plying on this service.

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smaller profits accruing from east-bound voyages. Italy made a desperate effort to capture the Balkan markets formerly held by Germany and she greatly increased her trade with these countries during 1939 and 1940. With Great Britain trade was relatively good in the early months of the war, and Italian business men were quite ready and even anxious to deal with us. In the autumn a Joint Standing Committee was established, the heads of which were Sir Wilfrid (now Lord) Greene, Master of the Rolls, and Senator Giannini. This Committee's main objectives were, briefly, to mitigate as far as possible grievances arising out of our exercise of the system of contraband control, and also to promote trade within the limits imposed by the circumstances of the two countries. So far as contraband control was concerned the Italians at first kept a firm check on their newspapers, though Count Ciano was soon warning us privately that he was receiving sheafs of complaints from shipping lines.<sup>1</sup> When, however, Italy was informed of the decision to seize German exports of German origin found in neutral ships Count Ciano showed restlessness, especially as about this time, the end of November, British newspapers referred to blockading the Mediterranean. It was realized by the Italians that a stoppage of German coal to Italy, some 4 million tons of which came by sea, would be a serious blow, and the argument<sup>2</sup> was adduced that since this German coal was mined by Italians and brought to Italy in Italian bottoms the intrinsic value was under 25% of the cost and that therefore the coal was not subject to our contraband control and to confiscation. Our plan was, roughly, to supply Italy with a corresponding quantity of British coal. Since British coal, of which we were then exporting about 4 million tons, cost in Italy some £2 : 5s. a ton, the effect would have been that Italy would have had to pay us about £18 millions for coal. This sum we were prepared to set off against purchases in Italy of aircraft, engines for motor-boats, hemp, guns, mercury and other commodities. We gave the Italians three months' notice in advance that shipments of German coal would be seized after March 1st, 1940.

This is, of course, only a bald and incomplete sketch of the negotiations which ultimately came to nothing. What is interesting is that

<sup>1</sup> See the example given above in the note from the *Popolo d' Italia* of March 13th, 1940, i.e. the day, it may be noted, on which Germany engaged to supply Italy with 12 million tons of coal a year by land. By accepting this offer Signor Mussolini made Italy dependent on Germany for her coal supplies.

<sup>2</sup> Article in the *Telegrafo*.

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Signor Mussolini was kept fully informed of the negotiations in their various phases, and that, so long as it served his purpose, he was not above allowing his compatriots to negotiate the sale to Great Britain of war material to be used against Italy's German ally. Italy had during these months been trying to send aeroplanes, etc. across Germany to Finland, for whose cause in the struggle against the Soviets there was genuine Italian sympathy. But when Moscow protested Germany had taken the line that, since she was a neutral in that war, she could not allow war material to be passed across her territory. Italy, therefore, in these two instances was acting upon the principle of Vespasian's famous dictum, *Num olet?* In the course of the Anglo-Italian discussions the Germans had, notably through Dr. Clodius, interfered with and altered the scope of the negotiations, and it was consequently only in accordance with precedent that Signor Mussolini, having finally decided to enter the war at an early date, ordered the negotiations to be broken off definitely at the end of May. The whole history of these negotiations is most instructive, showing as it does (1) the ready alacrity of Italian business men to deal with us to the detriment of their German allies, and (2) Signor Mussolini's cynical connivance at negotiations which he knew must be resented in Germany, thereby either deliberately sending us and his own representatives on a fool's errand or betraying a curious view of how he interpreted his duties as a non-belligerent towards his German ally. As to contraband there is some reason to suppose that not a very great quantity was passed through Italy into Germany. Somewhat vague charges were made in the British Press that the Allied blockade, for political or diplomatic reasons, had not erred on the side of strictness, and that Germany had been benefiting more than was good for the success of our blockade. Doubtless there were leakages, but it seems likely that Italy was in the main preoccupied with building up her own reserves of materials. "They don't seem to have any rules in particular; at least, if there are, nobody attends to them", commented Alice on the players in the Queen's croquet-party, and when a little later she was ordered to leave the court because she was more than a mile high, she told the King that "that's not a regular rule: you invented it just now". Signor Mussolini's behaviour towards Germany over matters of trade was marked by all the baffling casualness and improvisation of Wonderland. This is thoroughly characteristic of the man. While keeping tenaciously in view the objective of his long-term policy he has always tried to be ready with alternative tactical plans. The invention of the

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new status of non-belligerency afforded him ample scope for such manoeuvres.

In cutting off short the Anglo-Italian trade and contraband negotiations Signor Mussolini gave an unmistakeable warning that the hour of Italy's intervention was at hand. Having realized with what a sigh of relief<sup>1</sup> the declaration of non-belligerency had been received by the mass of the nation, Signor Mussolini had soon set to work to kindle a more martial flame. In one of those harangues, like that delivered at Eboli during the Abyssinian War, which was not published but which his hearers were authorized to spread abroad, Signor Mussolini as early as September 30th had told the Fascist leaders of Genoa to prepare for war. This would take a long time, ran the gist of his speech. And then? If it were to be peace, Italians were the best qualified to speak of it, since they had come through two wars. If it was to be war, the Italians would fight. But it was necessary to show a ruthless political realism. They were following their vital interest. No one was moved to emotion for them. Their position was very clear and allowed them to be the arbiters of their destiny. It allowed them to reject any *Aut Aut*, to which they would instantly reply *Contro*. No snivelling compassion, because peoples had the destiny they had created.

"If I", he went on to say, "had the misfortune to be English, I should be blue (*nero*), even very blue (*nerissimo*), more blue even than the Poles, egged on into war for roundabout reasons, just when they were on the point of yielding. Centuries-old hegemonies are about to totter. We are prisoners in the Mediterranean, a big prison, but a prison. Three gateways, but all well guarded and in the hands of enemies or adversaries. You must discipline the Italian people in view of the eventuality of war."

A few days later a parade of youths was addressed in Rome in the Villa Borghese Gardens by General Fabio Scala and Signor Starace, the Secretary of the Fascist Party, in language which an Italian friend of mine described to me the same evening as "rather disquieting". The speeches, which were not reported in the Press, suggested that the youths were very shortly to see active service, and my informant said that they had created a feeling of anxiety in all listeners and could not be dismissed as merely demagogic chauvinism. As time went on these semi-public "pep talks" became more and more frequent and more and more vigorous. In one of them delivered to the Fascists of the Trentino on

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chapter Four.



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May 15th, 1940, which was quickly passed from mouth to mouth Signor Mussolini announced that war was "inevitable". Otherwise Italy would risk getting nothing and would sink to the rank of a second-class Power, which he would never allow. Signor Mussolini's decision to intervene at a more or less given moment was, it seems, taken during an interview which he had with Herr Hitler on the Brenner on March 18th, 1940.<sup>1</sup> No *communiqué* was issued after that talk in the train which lasted for two and a half hours. A stiffening of the Italian attitude, however, was immediately noticeable. The Allied operations in Norway in April were jeered at. The word "Axis" was restored to use. German invincibility was stressed. A memorandum by the head of the Department of the Italian Foreign Office dealing with Economic Warfare, in which the obstructions caused by the Allied blockade were enumerated in detail, was the signal for a violent anti-British campaign. Posters grossly insulting to the Allies were plastered up in all the main towns of Italy. In a few instances British subjects, both men and women, were insulted and molested in the main streets of Rome by Fascist Yahoos. On May 16th hooligans broke into the British Institute in Milan and carried off portraits of the King and Queen. A Parliamentary Report declared that the Italian people now considered itself "in a position of pre-belligerency, in the sense that Italy was not prepared to pay for the benefit of peace at the cost of even the smallest sacrifice of her interests and aspirations, and is therefore already resolved to face any eventualities". Count Ciano, speaking in Milan on May 19th, insisted that "Rome must say, and will say, her word". The highly authoritative mouthpiece of the Palazzo Chigi, *Relazioni Internazionali*, stated bluntly that nothing counted except the supreme interest of the Italian people and "We have no scruples". Resolutions in favour of intervention were docilely voted by various bodies, and in a telegram sent to *The Times* on June 2nd I reported that "Choosing the date of Italy's entry into the war is rapidly becoming as popular a pastime as is choosing numbers every week in the State lottery". The *Popolo di Roma* for once was not exaggerating when on June 11th, the first day of intervention, it wrote that it would like to meet that Italian who could ever have nurtured for a single hour the "absurd hypothesis" that the war would be allowed to pass without Italy taking an active

<sup>1</sup> According to a broadcast delivered on October 4th, 1940. "On that day was fixed the time of Italy's historic intervention, according to the letter and the spirit of the political-military friendship between the peoples of Italy and Germany."

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share in the fighting. Only a crushing German defeat and the strong probability that the Allies would win the war could have availed to keep Italy non-belligerent in the interests of that "sacred egoism" which was as strong an influence with Signor Mussolini as it had been with Signor Salandra.

## *Chapter Four*

### PUBLIC OPINION AND THE MILITARY AND FINANCIAL FACTORS

AMONG the factors which weighed most heavily with Signor Mussolini in his decision to proclaim Italy's non-belligerency was Italian popular opinion. As at the beginning of the Four Years' War there were distinct camps. There were those—relatively few, but in some instances highly placed in the Fascist Party—who wanted to come into the war at once on the side of their German ally. Germany has never been popular with the masses in Italy. But Germany was felt, and rightly felt, to possess certain outstanding qualities which are lacking in the Italian people and which, willy-nilly, compel their admiration. There was, too, the bond of sympathy created by the natural affinity between the Fascist and Nazi, and indeed between all the totalitarian regimes, and by the lurking conviction that now Black were almost as heartily disliked as Brown Shirts in London and Paris. There was the feeling that Germany had had too raw a deal in 1919. The iniquities of "Versailles" had been as sedulously inculcated in Italy as in Germany. The belief had been instilled that Europe could only be regenerated by the application of the general principles common to all the totalitarian creeds. An anxious suspicion prevailed that if Hitlerism were swept away it would soon be followed into limbo by Fascism. It was not forgotten by the Germanophiles that Germany had not joined in the imposition of sanctions during the Abyssinian War. That she could scarcely do so since she had resigned from the League of Nations nearly two years previously and her membership was on the point of expiring, and that her attitude was mainly dictated by the desire to rescue herself from the isolation in which she had been placed by Hitler's progressively audacious violations of the Treaty of Versailles, was conveniently lost to sight. It was only recalled that Germany had been one of the few countries which had not registered disapproval of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. There was also a feeling, not by any means confined to Germanophiles, that to abandon Germany in the hour of danger would deal a severe blow to Italian prestige. However completely Italy was justified morally and juridically in breaking away from the Triple

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Alliance, her conduct in 1914-15, it was well known, had left behind a nasty taste in some mouths. It was, to be sure, universally supposed in Rome that the published provisions of the Italo-German Treaty did not tell the whole story and that there were secret articles or a secret understanding that would leave Italy some freedom of action in case Germany became involved in war. But on September 1st, 1939, this supposition was only a supposition, and, rather than cut a *brutta figura*, some Italians were ready to stand by the published terms of their alliance.

There were, on the other hand, Italians, mostly among the elder generation, who were no less prepared to join Great Britain and France. Signor Gino Buti, subsequently Italian Ambassador in Paris, remarked to me in the autumn of 1939 that there was much less angry feeling against England than there should be in the light of the British treatment of Italy over Abyssinia. Although it has become the fashion in Italian text-books to minimize, if not to deny outright, the help rendered by Great Britain and France to Italy in the *Risorgimento*, such a distortion of history was rejected by those whose schooling had been done under a more liberal and impartial regime. In days when the possession of a passport was independent of the Party then in power travel abroad had opened the minds of many Italians to the achievements of French and Anglo-Saxon civilization, to the vastness of the British and French Empires, and to the personal freedom enjoyed by the individual citizens in those communities. If Great Britain and France, each in a different way, had been inclined to patronize Italy and to treat her with humorous indulgence, there was, after all, something flattering in the genuine affection and admiration shown for the beauties of her countryside, the magnificence of her architecture, the loveliness of her works of art, and the good-natured *insouciance* of her poor and in those days lackadaisically-governed population. The English, in particular, had been constant and welcome visitors to Italy. There were English colonies dotted up and down the country. Mixed marriages were no rarity. If the elegant Italian lady went to Paris for her clothes, the Italian dandy looked no less faithfully to Savile Row. From Great Britain first came that love of sport which was elevated to the point of becoming an important Fascist cult. But unfortunately many of these anglophile and francophile Italians were now dead, and, though some of them, no doubt, passed on the torch to their descendants, it was increasingly difficult after the advent of Fascism for the younger generation to appreciate the values of their forebears. Unable to travel abroad,

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cut off from reading many of the more Liberal foreign newspapers, forbidden to exercise any liberty of discussion, they could not have the same intimate knowledge of their former Allies, whose good points and achievements they were in no position to understand.

But between these two opposing camps of vigorous partisans lay the mass of the Italian people. And the Italian people as a mass did not want war. It is always difficult to estimate precisely the effect of propaganda, especially upon a nation which is so naturally quick-witted as the Italian, and the instinctive distrustfulness of which is exemplified by the constant use of the word *esagerato*. The efficacy of propaganda, it would sometimes seem, is periodic rather than constant, dependent upon circumstances rather than capable always of creating the desired frame of mind. For seventeen years Signor Mussolini and his henchmen had striven to inculcate into their compatriots that they were a race of warriors, bursting with martial ardour, despising the easy armchair existence of the peaceable *bourgeois*, anxious to live dangerously and to be led into any and every adventurous enterprise. But in the summer of 1939 the gunpowder had fairly run out of the heels of their boots. The very idea of another war was anathema to them. There was no desire to add by fighting to the series of black-and-white marble maps which had been set up in the Via dell' Impero to illustrate various epochs in the growth of the Roman Empire and to teach to the Italians of to-day the extent of their imperial possessions. The deserts of Libya bulked large enough on the map, but their conquest had involved two wars and had done little enough to solve Italy's demographic problem. The gains from the Four Years' War had been so deliberately belittled with the object of discrediting the Peace Settlements that they are to-day grossly underestimated. The first thrill of the Abyssinian Empire had died away. If nobody ventured to speak about white elephants, it was ruefully admitted by good Fascists that the Abyssinians were more numerous than they had been thought to be; that not every Italian colonist could work and thrive on the higher *plateaux* or upon the sultry plains; that lack of communications in the country and the tolls of the Suez Canal Company added materially to the cost of transportation. The gibe that if Abyssinia had been worth grabbing the British would have grabbed it long ago came to have an unwelcome ring of truth about it. For the "non-intervention" brand of intervention in the Spanish Civil War there was never any popular enthusiasm. Rather the contrary. The knowledge, moreover, that intervention was sending up the national expenditure by many millions of lire added to

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the dislike felt for a campaign which, it was suspected, had as one of its motives the testing of military theories and arms likely soon to be put to a sterner proof elsewhere. Of the treacherous and incredibly mean occupation of Albania many Italians preferred not to talk.

Altogether, therefore, the first flush of imperialistic jingoism had died down, and the people as a whole wanted to be left to digest their conquests in peace. Above all there was no popular wish to enter a war on the side of Germany. There is a story told of the famous Lord Brougham that when his horses once bolted with him he poked his head out of his carriage window and said to his coachman, "Run into something cheap, John." Circumstances and sound judgement had hitherto enabled Signor Mussolini to blood his braves at a comparatively light cost in human lives. The Italian people was quick enough to realize that an active military alliance with Germany would mean no mere anaemic adventure. As the clouds began to lour more threateningly the murmurs of discontent and apprehension grew increasingly loud. In the north, in particular, dislike of the German connexion was expressed with a frankness of opinion such as had not been heard in Italy for many a long year. The wildest rumours were current. It was not uncommon to hear it said that not only were there sharp divisions of opinion between leading members of the Cabinet and of the Fascist Party, but that the pro-German orientation was strongly disliked by the King and other members of the Royal Family, by a great majority of the senior officers in the fighting services and by the leading industrialists, and that orders for mobilization on Germany's side would be met by revolution and strikes. Be all that as it may, the Prefects throughout the country appear to have convinced Signor Mussolini that if he lined up with Germany he would have a preponderatingly reluctant nation behind him. The wave of profound and outspoken relief which swept over Italy when it was learned that the Cabinet had decided upon a policy of non-belligerency was the best evidence of the overwhelming approval and popularity of that decision.

There were other, and from the practical standpoint still more cogent reasons why Italy should not be dragged into war by her masterful and impetuous ally. Of these the most important was, naturally, the military unpreparedness of the armed forces. Signor Mussolini more than once declared that, in the event of war, he could put 8 million men in the field. This statement, as has been shown, was sheer exaggeration. There may have been 8 million men of military age, but there was not the equipment for anything approaching that number, and

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much of what there was turned out to be poor stuff. At the date of the signature of the Italo-German Treaty it was authoritatively stated <sup>1</sup> that Italy alone could ensure the constant efficiency of 63 Divisions, besides another 12 Divisions represented by the Frontier Guard and supplementary troops, plus the Militia and those undergoing pre-military training. She had also "impressive reserves" formed by 20 trained classes, which were "always ready for mobilization". These reserves, which "the improvised armies like that of Britain will be short of for many years to come", were "essential for the lightning type of war", for which the Italian military authorities declared that their methods of training and preparations were intended. As to Italy's industrial capacity in armaments, it was claimed that developments then in hand would allow of a war production in 1940 four times as great as that of 1939. Whether this claim was or was not made good is immaterial. The established fact is that Italy proved incapable of meeting fully all the demands of a long war.

"Modern war", the Crown Prince Umberto was reported as saying on May 24th, 1943, "demands new weapons, specialization and a complex industrial system. Unfortunately Italy, in spite of her gigantic technical and industrial efforts, has been unable to make as many arms as other countries. She lacks raw materials. This lack, which prevents the Italian people from living in security, is one of the reasons for her entry into the war. It is essential that Italy should solve her problems of providing heavy raw materials and fuel."

The German invasion of Poland found Italy with about 1,500,000 soldiers under arms, and with both her fleet and her air force fully mobilized. Of her army the vast bulk was in Italy, and only about 170,000 men were distributed throughout her overseas possessions in Albania, Libya, East Africa and the Aegean islands. Her fleet at that date was composed of 2 reconstructed battleships; 19 modern cruisers; 3 old cruisers; 70 modern torpedo boats and torpedo boat destroyers, and another 50 over ten years old; about 100 submarines; a large number of MAS (swift anti-submarine motorboats), and numerous auxiliary vessels. It was disposed in two main squadrons based upon Spezia and Taranto.<sup>2</sup> The Air Force was calculated to consist of about

<sup>1</sup> Signor Gayda in the *Giornale d' Italia*.

<sup>2</sup> By the time that Italy entered the war 2 new battleships of the Littorio class and 2 more reconstructed battleships had come into active service. On October 28th, 1942, the Press announced the following figures of the numbers

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2,200 effective first-line machines with a 20% reserve. Of these it was thought that about one-half were fighters, one-quarter bombers and another quarter reconnaissance planes. These figures must, however, be received with caution. Other estimates put the Italian strength much higher. It was then thought that the material was quite good, but that there was not much of it. The petrol supplies were said to be small and not of very good quality. The experience gained in Abyssinia was of no value. In Spain, however, the experience had been useful, as it had inculcated team work with the Army. The personnel was very self-confident.<sup>1</sup> About 25% was judged by competent critics to be first class, while 50% was reckoned to be of average worth. The residue was Fascist "white trash".

The outbreak of the war came at an awkward moment for the Army. On the basis of experience gained in the fighting in Abyssinia and in Spain and tested during the army manoeuvres of 1938 the Italian authorities had decided to replace the existing "*ternaria*" (3 regiment) Division by the newly-conceived "*binaria*" (2 regiment) Division. This decision entailed a fundamental reorganization. It involved a reduction in the size and ponderousness of the existing infantry Divisions, and it called for the creation of new Divisions incorporating the units drawn from the former "ternary" Divisions. Italian military opinion apparently reckoned that the decrease in man-power and in machine-guns would be more than compensated by the greater power of manoeuvre and mobility of the new type of Division and by the large increase in the number of mortars and by its generally enhanced offensive power. Foreign technical judgement was, however, not wholly convinced. The opposition encountered in Abyssinia and in Spain was thought to have been too weak to justify a definitive verdict, and the view was held that the new Division might prove too light

and tonnage of warships, completely built or entirely re-modernized during the Fascist era, which were being fitted out when war was declared: 8 battle-ships totalling 234,488 tons; 8 heavy cruisers totalling 79,232 tons; 26 light cruisers totalling 113,264 tons; 160 destroyers and torpedo boats totalling 163,326 tons; 133 submarines totalling 110,800 tons—a grand total of 701,110 tons. In addition there were auxiliary ships for local use, the MAS and special ships.

<sup>1</sup> This confidence received a nasty blow during the Battle of Britain. Signor Mussolini had himself requested and obtained Herr Hitler's "permission" to send a force to join in the bombing of London, but the Italian machines and pilots proved so inferior to ours that they were shot out of the sky and were very soon withdrawn.



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when employed against first-class modern European armies. The decrease in man-power was compensated to a slight degree by the formal embodiment<sup>1</sup> of two Black Shirt (Militia) battalions in each Division. But this measure only added about 1,200 men to each Division. In any case whether such criticisms were or were not well founded it is obvious that a period of tranquillity was much needed to enable the General Staff to reconstitute the Army on its new basis. The succession of political crises which preceded the outbreak of the war interfered with this task.

That the Italian Army was rather better prepared, materially and morally, in September 1939 than it had been in August 1914 may be granted. According to Marshal Cadorna the opening of the Four Years' War caught the Italian Army at a low ebb. He declared that mobilization would find the Army short of officers, uniforms, ammunition, artillery and supplies in general. He reported that its morale had been impaired by long neglect and that it had not been raised by the recently-concluded Libyan war which had failed to improve the instruction of the troops. These material short-comings were far from being absent in 1939. Apart from the disorganization caused by the change-over from the "ternary" to the "binary" Division the Army was in process of receiving new patterns of rifles; machine-guns; field, anti-tank and anti-aircraft artillery; mortars and tanks. It was also short of clothing, boots and blankets; it was notably behindhand in anti-aircraft defence of all kinds; and it was lamentably lacking in heavy artillery. Its mobilization machinery had proved inadequate during several trials, and there was a definite deficiency of trained junior officers and N.C.O.s. The increase in the number of Divisions of the regular Army had necessitated an increase in the number of Generals and other staff officers, and had made more patent the deficiency of competent officers and instructors. On the other hand the campaigns in Abyssinia and in Spain had not been wholly unfruitful. These wars had been fought by armies comprising colonial, auxiliary (the Black Shirt militiamen) and volunteer forces in addition to units of the regular Army. The operations had been conducted and planned predominantly by the General Staff. The rivalry between the regular units and those of the Militia had had many favourable reactions upon both bodies, and any lessons learned in the field had quickly been absorbed. The creation of the Fascist Militia had at first been very unpopular with the Army, the officers of which were inclined to see

<sup>1</sup> On March 1st, 1940.

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in it a private rival organization and resented the higher rank not infrequently conferred upon those reserve officers who had accepted service with the Black Shirts. This jealousy never disappeared. Little by little, however, these sentiments had been replaced by feelings of more intimate *camaraderie*. The Black Shirts fought in Libya, in Abyssinia and in Spain, and in some cases overcame the gibe that they were an unmitigated liability. Since 1937 all the youth organizations had been amalgamated into the so-called G.I.L. (Gioventù Italiana del Littorio) under the direct control of the Fascist Party, and this organization assumed complete responsibility for the system of the pre-military training of Italian Youth between the ages of 8 and 21 years. This system of Fascist pre-military training has been of distinct value to the regular Army. The conscripts now called to the colours are no longer the raw and refractory recruits they often were. Subjected from an early age to physical exercises, often imbued with intense and even excessive pride and confidence in the merits and accomplishments of the Fascist regime, they have appeared upon the barrack square already primed with a degree of military training and knowledge which it would probably take about six months of service with the Army for them to acquire and which naturally has been a great asset in the hands of the regular Army instructors. Apart from the 132 battalions<sup>1</sup> of militiamen which were embodied in the Divisions of the regular Army the Militia contained many other battalions of men cast for a less active role to whom are assigned various forms of special and defensive duties. The nominal total strength of the Militia, all its subsidiary branches included, in September 1939 was put at about 450,000.

Upon the whole, then, it was fair to assume that in training and morale the Italian Army had made considerable improvement since 1914 and would probably acquit itself tolerably well in a short war of quick decision. Lack of money and of certain essential raw materials, however, made Italy averse from engaging in what might prove to be a war of attrition and economic endurance. Such a war, too, would not be that best suited to the national temperament. The Italian with his quick intelligence and his ability to cover up his lack of thoroughness by his talent for improvisation, with his quickly-roused enthusiasm and his love of the spectacular exploit could be trusted to respond to clever and enterprising leadership. How he would stand up to a series of reverses it was hard to say. It was, however, not to be forgotten

<sup>1</sup> On the basis of two Militia battalions to a Division this figure and Signor Gayda's estimates are virtually identical.

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that full justice had not been done to the rapidity of the Italian recovery after Caporetto, and that since those days the Italian fibre had been toughened by the physical and moral training of Fascism. Nevertheless the whole system of training and Italian military preparations had been based upon the policy of a rapid concentration and swift offensive in strength by highly mobile units and were intended to forestall the establishment of trench warfare.

The Italian Navy, in all probability, was, relatively, the most efficient of the three fighting services. Its ships, for the most part, were modern or had been modernized, and it was well-balanced in its composition. So long, as might be anticipated, as the Italian fleet was called upon to operate only in the Mediterranean and similar adjoining seas it was not a fleet to be overlooked, with its large numbers of light and swift craft and with more submarines than were possessed by any other Power with the single exception of the U.S.S.R. At the outbreak of the war it could not have risked a general fleet action against the British and French Mediterranean fleets since the only capital ships then in active service were the reconstructed battleships *Cavour* and *Cesare*.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand Italy had, by the "battle of the grain" and other measures for developing her economic self-sufficiency, done something to reduce the volume of her indispensable imports and had to that extent freed her Navy from the task of convoying her merchant ships and thus enabled it to protect her military communications with Libya, with the Dodecanese and with Albania. Italy, in other words, was not necessarily compelled to be always on the defensive. She was able to think of attacking the vulnerable spots of her possible adversaries and to employ her massed forces in offensives concentrated upon the enemy's most delicate points. In particular, it would appear from the writings of naval experts, she hoped to make a skilful use of her surface vessels and submarines combined, and, in certain eventualities,

<sup>1</sup> See above, page 48. Thanks to our crippling air raid upon Taranto and also to the severe drubbing administered at the Battle of Cape Matapan, the Italian fleet was for a long time quite unfit to venture on a general fleet action. Signor Mussolini, who was Minister of all the three Service Departments, did not dare lightly to try to make good his boast before the Senate on March 30th, 1938, when he declared: "To those who, when discussing naval strategy, advance the hypothesis that in future wars the battleships will remain closely watched over in harbour—as they did during the Great War—I reply that that will not happen in the case of Italy." In spite of his bluster he was made to realize that, in the words of the warning to railway passengers, it was *pericoloso sporgersi*.

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to manœuvre her surface vessels in such a way as to lure her opponent into waters infested by her submarines.

The fleet, however, had distinct limitations. More lightly built than our own ships, the Italian vessels were primarily designed for service in the Mediterranean, and, with the exception of some of the larger ocean-going submarines, were not fitted for work in heavy weather. The fleet was, too, without adequate war experience. During the Four Years' War the Italians had not been called upon to engage in any major action against the Austro-Hungarian Navy, though individual commanders had performed gallant exploits. These exploits in themselves did not, however, qualify either the leaders or their subordinates to take charge of large formations. The Italian Navy had no Badoglio or Balbo to whom it could look up as could the sister services to the victor of a well-planned campaign or the leader of spectacular long-distance flights. The Under-Secretary of State and Chief of the Naval Staff was no more than a competent officer who was a keen member of the Fascist Party, while the deputy-Chief of Staff, said to be a man of exceptional capabilities, was an officer who had been jumped to Admiral's rank without having ever been in command of a large ship as a captain. Of the personnel about 40% were long-service men, as against 60% who were conscripts, serving for twenty-eight months. Finally the Italian fleet was without seaplane carriers or an air arm of its own, though of course, certain vessels carried seaplanes on board. These, however, were disadvantages of which Italian technical opinion affected to make light, and which, serious as they were, were, perhaps, less serious to a country in Italy's geographical position than they would otherwise have been.

The financial and economic situation was far from satisfactory. The financial year 1938-9 had closed with a deficit of 5,778 million lire on the ordinary, and of 6,500 millions on the extraordinary budget. The official estimates for the year 1939-40 forecast a deficit on the ordinary budget of 4,755 millions, but it was reckoned by competent experts that the real deficit should be put at 7,000 millions, while no estimate of the deficit on the extraordinary budget was attempted. The total of the public debt at this date had risen to about 200 milliards of lire. Stocks of most raw materials were very low, and in most categories emergency war stocks were non-existent. The textile mills were calculated to have supplies for about three months, but the iron and steel industries were living almost from hand to mouth, and in general the steady flow of production was disturbed by uncertainty and the lack of

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assured supplies of essential raw materials. Imports were being cut down to a bare minimum, while exports were being fostered by an expensive system of subsidies, the cost of which was thrown on to the home consumer. The country, in short, was economically exhausted; inroads were being made upon the reserves of the Bank of Italy; tourist traffic had fallen away; remittances from abroad had dwindled. Business men were utterly averse from the country being plunged into any fresh adventure and expenditure, and more especially, in the industrial north there were outspoken grumbings against a policy that threatened to involve Italy in war beside an undesired ally.<sup>1</sup>

How heavily all these various factors had weighed with the Italian Cabinet was subsequently revealed in the speech which Count Ciano delivered to the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations on December 16th, 1939. At the risk of making some of Signor Mussolini's more ebullient popular harangues earlier in the year sound perilously akin to bluff, Count Ciano admitted that the Italo-German alliance was based upon the essential premise<sup>2</sup> that a long period of time was necessary to Italy and Germany to complete their work of internal reconstruction and to perfect their military preparations. "The duration of this period was fixed by us at three years; on the German side at four or five." Until this period had elapsed "the Government of the Reich agreed with us on the opportuneness of not raising any question calculated to provoke fresh polemics". Though Count Ciano was at some pains later in his speech to deny that the precipitation of events had caught Italy unprepared for war, this statement was qualified by his confession that the Abyssinian and Spanish wars had involved "an enormous consumption" of war material, and that "a minimum period of three years was necessary to raise to the desired—that is to the maximum—level the preparation of her war equipment". His words were confirmed by Signor Mussolini when he declared<sup>3</sup> that "history catches you by the throat and forces you to take decisions", and that "had we been 100% ready we should have entered the war in September 1939 instead of June 1940". By "history" was, of course, meant Herr Hitler.

<sup>1</sup> See also Chapters Three and Eight.

<sup>2</sup> Established at Milan during the Conference of May 6th and 7th, 1939.

<sup>3</sup> Speech in the Teatro Adriano of February 23rd, 1941.

## *Chapter Five*

### THE DIE CAST

WHEN on June 10th, 1940, Signor Mussolini announced to the yelling, seething mob before the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia that Italy had just declared war upon Great Britain and France he probably flattered himself that he had brought off the master stroke of his career. Nor was he without substantial reasons for so thinking. France was rapidly wilting before the savage onslaught of the German armour. The "Weygand Line" had been pierced, and at the request of the French High Command the Government Departments and the Diplomatic Corps were transferred on that same day from Paris to Tours. The British Army had received a stunning blow at Dunkirk. To what dangerous straits the land forces of Great Britain had been reduced by the loss of their equipment and war material was, fortunately, not known to Signor Mussolini and Herr Hitler. It was not, however, supposed for a moment that she would be in a position to carry on the struggle for any length of time after that total collapse of France which was already confidently envisaged. Not, indeed, that any such senseless and desperate gesture was necessarily to be anticipated. It was true that in an appeal to Signor Mussolini to keep the peace written on May 16th Mr. Churchill had embodied a warning that, whatever might happen on the Continent, England would go on to the end, even quite alone, as she had done before. But Signor Mussolini probably regarded the Prime Minister's words as part of the ordinary stock-in-trade of the politician, to which no undue importance should be attached. In any case, even if Mr. Churchill really did mean what he wrote, he was barely settled down into the saddle, and it remained to be seen whether he would succeed in injecting his own intransigent spirit into the mass of his compatriots. It was an axiom, especially since "sanctions", that Great Britain was irretrievably decadent and degenerate. Had not his confederates, Herren Hitler and Ribbentrop, and many of his most trusted Fascist advisers spoken in this sense? Not so very many months had elapsed since Mr. Chamberlain had been acclaimed with tempestuous enthusiasm when he announced that he had brought back peace from Munich, and even fewer months had passed since Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax had

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been charmed by the warmth of their welcome to Rome. Apart from an ill-starred expedition and a few Commando raids upon Norway, which had only the nuisance value of mosquito bites, Great Britain had shown little more readiness than France to interrupt the torpor of the "phoney" war in the West. Was it not, then, an even chance that the spirit of appeasement<sup>1</sup> was still strong in Great Britain, and that, even if she did not seek to make peace as soon as she learned of the final fall of France, she would not be either able or willing to continue her resistance for very long? There was, therefore, no more time to be lost. Further delay in declaring war might mean that Italy would only be allowed by Germany to filch a very small share of the spoils of two Empires. Risks, of course, were inevitable, but they appeared to be almost negligible in proportion to the prospective plunder. Signor Mussolini, then, considered that he had good grounds for thinking that a war against Great Britain and France at this juncture would, in all the circumstances, be a cheap and profitable undertaking.

No inkling of such calculations appeared either in Signor Mussolini's announcement or in the comments of the Press. In his speech<sup>2</sup> Signor Mussolini declared that Italy had taken up arms against the plutocratic and reactionary Democracies of the West, which he accused of having plotted against the very existence of the Italian people. He summed up recent history as a succession of promises, threats and blackmail, crowned by the ignoble siege of 52 nations belonging to the League. Italy's conscience was absolutely tranquil. Everything humanly possible had been done to avoid the storm. It would have been sufficient to have revised the treaties<sup>3</sup> by adapting them to the changing exigencies in the lives of the nations; it would have been sufficient not to have initiated the stupid policy of guarantees,<sup>4</sup> and not to have rejected Herr Hitler's proposal made on October 6th, 1939, at the close

<sup>1</sup> The hope put in the "appeasers" was shown in an Italian broadcast of October 10th, 1940, describing the third meeting that year on the Brenner between Signor Mussolini and Herr Hitler. "Yesterday," said the speaker, "while the Axis Powers continued their operations in tranquillity and comradeship, mediocre and traditional Conservative types crept out of the British Government, leaving behind them the rabid and desperate sanctionists of once-upon-a-time. The ascendancy of this desperation squad of politicians, so far removed from the real heart of the British people, implies with certainty that a serious internal crisis in the country is impending."

<sup>2</sup> The full text is given in Appendix Two.

<sup>3</sup> I.e. the treaties of the Paris Peace Settlement.

<sup>4</sup> Given to Poland, Greece and Roumania by Great Britain and France.

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of the Polish campaign. If Italy to-day had decided to face the risks and sacrifices of war it was because this decision was forced upon her by consideration for her honour, interests and future. No nation was really great which did not regard its engagements as sacred and which shrank from the supreme tests. Italy was taking up arms to solve, after having solved the problem of her Continental frontiers, the problem also of her sea frontiers. Italy was being suffocated in her own sea, and a people of 45 millions could only win true freedom by having free access to the ocean. Signor Mussolini described the present struggle as only a phase in the logical development of the Fascist Revolution, as a struggle between the poor, overpopulated, fertile and young peoples against the sterile, rich and greedily monopolistic nations already in decline. It was a struggle between two centuries and two ideas. He insisted that Italy had no intention of involving her neighbours, and he solemnly warned Switzerland, Jugoslavia, Greece, Turkey and Egypt that they alone would be to blame if his words were not confirmed in the event. Signor Mussolini recalled having declared in Berlin that under the code of Fascist morality one stood by a friend to the very end, and that was how Italy was going to behave towards Germany. Proletarian and Fascist Italy was on her feet for the third time, proud, strong and united as never before, and she would be victorious and bestow a long period of peace with justice upon herself, Europe and the world.

The organized Fascist *claque*, it goes without saying, did their duty, and their cheers were taken up by the frenzied mob which overflowed from the Piazza Venezia into the converging streets and swarmed upon the gleaming white steps of that marble atrocity, the Victor Emmanuel Monument. But the harangue had a singularly transient effect. After Signor Mussolini had been recalled several times on to his balcony, and after many loyal demonstrators had marched up to the Quirinal Palace to show their affection for the King and the House of Savoy, an unexpected and highly significant calm fell upon the city. In the centre at least there was no rowdiness and no signs either of rejoicing. The shops were quickly shut. Along the famous Corso Umberto, the Via Condotti, the Piazza di Spagna and the Via Frattina, in which my own flat was situated, I did not see that evening a single flag hung out. Many people stood long in their doorways and muttered anxiously to one another. A plain-clothes policeman was soon keeping an eye upon my front door, but his presence did not deter several Italian friends from coming to say goodbye, and even more of



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them telephoned their regrets for what was happening and wished me good luck and a quick return. Other British residents had the same experience. One of the most marked Italian characteristics is, in fact, the propensity to stress the personal factor. In the spring of 1936, for example, when the virulent anti-British campaign on account of "sanctions" was at its height, I, as Correspondent of *The Times*, was one of two foreign journalists invited by Marshal Balbo to visit the Tripoli Fair. I was unfortunately unable to accept the invitation, and in declining it said jokingly to the Foreign Office official through whom I had received it that in the circumstances I was rather surprised to have been asked. The official instantly replied, "But, my dear Macartney, you surely don't suppose that we should think of identifying you personally with the policy of your country." And nothing, it may here incidentally be remarked, could have been more courteous and considerate than the treatment shown to Sir Percy Loraine and those British subjects who were allowed to travel with him on the diplomatic train to Ancona and thence in the *Conte Rosso* to Lisbon, where we trans-shipped into the *Monarch of Bermuda* which had brought Signor Bastianini and his party from Great Britain. The *Conte Rosso* was spick and span. She was provisioned with quantities of luxurious food. For various reasons we remained in port in Ancona from early in the morning of June 12th until 11.30 P.M. of June 19th, when we left on a brilliant moonlight night and steamed down the Adriatic coast on a dead calm sea, the sides of the vessel being flood-lit so as to illuminate the word *Diplomatico* painted on them in large letters. There was a further halt of thirty-six hours off Catania, and it was rumoured that the R.A.F. was bombing Augusta. At dinner-time on June 23rd, when the sea was rather choppy and the weather squally, we sighted an Italian squadron comprising battleships, cruisers, t.b.d.s and submarines. One t.b.d. came dashing towards us at full speed, took a good look at us at close quarters and then turned leisurely away. The officers on board were studiously correct, but the crew and waiters, nearly all of whom spoke English, were unaffectedly friendly, and when we left them in Lisbon on June 27th they waved their handkerchiefs and shouted farewells. The collapse of France had become known to us during the voyage, and undoubtedly most of the Italians regarded the war as virtually finished. Many of us felt something approaching a momentary twinge of regret when we read later that the *Conte Rosso* had been sunk.

It is not very difficult to undersand why, when once the effervescence

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of the moment had died down, Signor Mussolini's speech was found singularly inadequate to the occasion. He had referred in so many words to "promises, threats, blackmail, and finally, as the coping-stone of the edifice, the ignoble siege of 32 States belonging to the League". But Signor Mussolini had not produced any evidence for the first three of these accusations, and, though the imposition of "sanctions" undoubtedly rankled still in many minds, Italians were perfectly well aware that their imposition had been only half-hearted. In any case much water had flowed down the Tiber since then, and Great Britain and Italy were supposed to have buried the hatchet by the conclusion of two agreements. Anyhow not even Signor Mussolini had specifically based his declaration of war upon those charges. In so far as he gave definite motives he attributed the war in which Italy was now intervening to the refusal of Great Britain and France to revise the treaties of the Paris Peace Settlement; to the "stupid" policy of guarantees; to the rejection of Herr Hitler's offer of October 6th, 1939, and to Italy's sacred obligation to carry out her engagements. But these motives were specious rather than sound. Treaty Revision was an old hobby-horse which Signor Mussolini had begun to ride even before he came to power.<sup>1</sup> Of revision there had been numerous, even fatally numerous, instances. In a speech made to the Senate on June 5th, 1928, Signor Mussolini had himself said that it would be interesting to establish "how many clauses of the Treaty of Versailles have not been applied, and how many others have had or will have a mitigated or altered application". Even before this speech it was widely recognized from practical experience that the Peace Settlements could not be applied to the letter in their entirety. Where Signor Mussolini threw his spanner into the machinery was in placing the territorial and colonial clauses of the treaties at the head of his list of the provisions to be revised and improved, and in advancing to the same priority the clauses imposing military restrictions upon the vanquished. He and his henchmen now started to develop systematically theses elaborated to convince the world that what suited the policy and interests of Italy was advantageous to European harmony and tallied with the loftiest principles of ethics and justice. On this score, as was briefly indicated in the opening chapter, Italy had more plausible grievances, such as they were, against France than she had against Great Britain.

Signor Mussolini's reference to the policy of guarantees was par-

<sup>1</sup> See relevant chapter in Macartney and Cremona, *op. cit.*

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ticularly unconvincing.<sup>1</sup> The unilateral guarantees given by Great Britain and France to Roumania and Greece, and the defensive declarations signed between Great Britain and, later, France and Turkey were nothing but the most justifiable precautions, which in no way merited the outcry about encirclement. The pledge of assistance given to Poland caused the most perturbation in Rome, where the fear was aroused that it would fatally encourage the Poles to be more stubborn than before with the Nazis.<sup>2</sup> To say it was provocative was, however, sheer humbug and hypocrisy. In that same month of March 1939 Hitler had again shown that no trust was to be put in his word by occupying Prague and disrupting Czechoslovakia. So far, then, from being provocative the pledge to Poland was a defensive measure, intended to warn Herr Hitler that the patience of others than himself was not inexhaustible and that he was not going to be allowed to go on for ever with his unilateral infringements of his most solemn commitments. For Signor Mussolini to include among his more definite motives for intervention the rejection by the Allies of Herr Hitler's offer of October 6th was simply puerile and only worth noticing because it assumed and attributed to the statesmen of Great Britain and France the same cynical and callous readiness to break their word that was innate in the Axis leaders. It would be hard to say whether master or man was the worse offender. The score chalked up against Signor Mussolini included his attack upon Abyssinia, whose admission to the League Italy had favoured; his invasion of Albania, which incidentally was a deliberate breach of the Anglo-Italian Agreement of April 16th, 1938; his lying protestations about non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War, and the statement that Italy would not "initiate military operations" which had accompanied the declaration of non-belligerency. To speak, then, as Signor Mussolini now did of Italy's sacred obligation to carry out her engagements and as he had also spoken in his "dusty" answer to Mr. Churchill's appeal was utter rubbish. The utmost that could be said of him was that on this occasion

His honour rooted in dishonour stood,  
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true,

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter Two.

<sup>2</sup> Signor Virginio Gayda, in his book *Che cosa vuole l' Italia*, says that on May 27th, 1939, Signor Mussolini, in a conversation with Sir Percy Loraine, had called the attention of the British Government to the dangers created by the unconditional guarantee given to Poland by Great Britain and France.

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and even that for purely sordid reasons, simply and solely because Tabaqui was longing to get his share in Shere Khan's kill.

Nothing, perhaps, has penetrated so deeply under many Italian skins as the taunt that the declaration of war, made when it was made, was so timed as to constitute a treacherous and cowardly blow in the back of recent Allies and nominal friends. To some few Fascist realists the scorn immediately expressed by President Roosevelt and other decent-minded men throughout the world was nothing but sentimental drivel. Had not the great Bismarck declared that in politics there was no room either for love or hatred, and was it not the prime duty of every patriotic statesman to win all possible advantages for his country at the lowest possible cost? But many of the more honourable Italians writhed under the slur. Even Signor Mussolini himself felt compelled to rebut the accusation. In a speech made on November 18th, 1940, he said:

"France was reeling, but was still far from being brought to her knees; and nobody could foresee that the army, reputed to be the strongest in Europe, would melt away like snow in the sun, when on June 10th Italy entered the war to keep to the letter and the spirit of the alliance, and to break at last the prison bars of her sea."

The Italian newspapers were vociferous and voluble in their attempts to deny the imputation. The *Popolo di Roma* declared that, on Italy's entry into the war, the French fleet in the Mediterranean numbered 4 battleships, 1 aircraft carrier, 13 cruisers, 17 scouts, 15 destroyers, 49 submarines, 14 signal ships, 5 auxiliary cruisers, 5 torpedo boats and 11 other craft. These ships were in a fully efficient condition and were in close touch with the British Mediterranean Fleet which on June 30th was formed of 5 battleships, 13 cruisers, 3 aircraft carriers, 14 destroyers, 18 submarines, 5 auxiliary cruisers, 8 gunboats and 29 various craft. Moreover, other British ships in the North and South Atlantic and in the Indian Ocean could easily be concentrated in the Mediterranean. Italy, in declaring war upon Great Britain and France, faced single-handed all these imposing combined naval forces. Sixteen days passed before the armistice with France was concluded, and thus, the newspaper proceeded, there was sufficient time for the two fleets to have taken action against Italy, which, on account of her long coasts, might be considered an island. The vicissitudes of the land fighting bore no relation to the Italian sector in the Mediterranean. From the very outset the French and British fleets were "held in check" by the powerful Italian Navy.

Few Italians can have been duped by such statements. Indeed very

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many of them would have been extremely angry and even more miserable than they were if they had believed such nonsense to be true. If, as we have seen, the gathering of the war clouds in the preceding September had been watched in Italy with general gloom and dread, the intervening months had brought no overwhelming desire to join in the fray. So long as Italy was not actually committed to intervention there was always the hope that that *furbo* Duce would somehow or other steer the country safely through the storm; and that by retaining his independent position, such as it was, he might be able to put a brake upon Herr Hitler and at the same time succeed eventually in cajoling or browbeating the Allies, and more particularly the stubborn England, into accepting some compromise. If Signor Giolitti had had good reasons for hoping in 1914-15 that Italy could secure a great deal (*parecchio*) from the Central Empires without entering the war, surely Signor Mussolini was on at least equally strong ground in 1939-40. From the purely material standpoint many Italians were only too eager for their country to remain non-belligerent. Commercial and financial interests did not want war. The newspapers were filled with daily adjurations to the nation not only to carry on their business as before but even to increase their efforts in every possible direction and to seize without delay those markets which the belligerents were compelled to abandon. Restrictions upon the export of many articles had been raised with the evident purpose of strengthening the financial reserves of foreign currency. The prohibition on the sale of coffee and the revived advertising of different kinds of nationally-produced goods, almost forgotten since "sanctions" were abolished, were likewise intended to keep money in Italy. But now all these hopes and advantages had been brought to an end. The feeling uppermost, perhaps, on that June evening among the people as a whole was one of regret and bewilderment. As they turned over the words of Signor Mussolini in their minds they were at a loss to understand why Italy, having been pronounced by her leader to be a "satisfied" nation after the conquest of Abyssinia, should suddenly be declared to be in danger of suffocation if she were not put in immediate possession of large portions of the British and French Empires. It was all very curious and disquieting. Some of the Italian claims trumped up against France could, it was privately admitted, only be backed by the raking-up of certain half-buried pretensions. France could not seriously be expected to listen to such absurdities. Other claims were more legitimate and susceptible of argument, but was not M. Paul

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Reynaud less intransigent than many of his predecessors and had he not declared again only a few days ago that he was ready to discuss any reasonable claim dividing the two Latin countries?

"There is no nation", he had said, "with whom France cannot settle by peaceful means the divergent interests which appear to oppose each other. . . . France desires a settlement of those problems and the reconstruction of a Europe in which the prosperity and independence of each nation are assured."

This, like M. Reynaud's previous advances, was treated as coming too late. But Italy's outstanding grievances against Great Britain were supposed to have been settled under the Agreement of April 16th, 1938, and such questions as had arisen during the nine months of the war had been seen to be amenable to diplomatic solution. Italy had never officially put forward any territorial claims against Great Britain. Not only had the two countries never been at war, but the words of Garibaldi were recalled:

"England is a great and powerful nation, foremost in human progress, enemy to despotism, the only safe refuge for the exile, friend of the oppressed; and if ever England should be in such circumstances as to require the help of an ally, cursed be the Italian who would not step forward in her defence."

It was hard, therefore, to understand why Italy should now go to war with Great Britain just because she had held the rock of Gibraltar for more than two hundred years and because she was now on friendly terms once more with the country that dominated the Bosphorus, or again why Great Britain was to be held responsible for the tolls exacted by the Suez Canal Company, a commercial undertaking directed from Paris and operating upon Egyptian territory. One thing at least was sure. If Signor Mussolini had dragged Italy into this fresh war without the certainty of conviction that the stab of his stiletto would end the strugglings of his victims, why, so much the worse for Signor Mussolini and for Italy. Only a speedy victory could justify such an unsavoury and dastardly stroke. In a broadcast delivered soon after Signor Mussolini's speech Mr. Duff Cooper stated that no war had ever been declared with so little provocation as this. To his Italian listeners the words of the Minister of Information must have rung uncomfortably true.

Speaking a little more than a year previously <sup>1</sup> Signor Mussolini had

<sup>1</sup> At Cuneo in May 1939. See Chapter Two.

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announced that he would henceforward hold his tongue and let the people speak. They took him at his word and expressed their views so freely that after four months Signor Mussolini found it impossible to keep silence any longer. The Italian people, he informed the Fascists of Bologna,<sup>1</sup> knows that it must not bother the pilot, especially when he is steering the ship in a storm, and must not be continually questioning him about the course.

"If and when I shall appear upon the balcony and summon the entire Italian people to hear me, it will not be to submit to it an examination of the situation, but to announce to it—as I did on October 2nd, 1935, and on May 9th, 1936—decisions, I repeat decisions, of historical import."

If Signor Mussolini had kept his word and let the people really decide their own destiny, the declaration of war of June 10th would never have been pronounced. It is only too true that, as Signor Mussolini, General Teruzzi and others claimed, this was essentially a "Fascist" war.

<sup>1</sup> September 23rd, 1939.

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AND ABETTORS

AN Italian journalist, whose first appointment abroad brought him to London, once confessed to me his initial feelings of amazement and even of consternation when he opened his morning newspapers and found how relatively little attention was paid by the British Press to Italian affairs and to the doings of Signor Mussolini. Had something terrible happened during his journey from Rome, and had the whole life of Italy been brought to a standstill? Had there been a break-down in communications? He scanned newspaper after newspaper with the same result. It was some weeks and even months, he admitted, before he began to realize that in English eyes Signor Mussolini was not the hub of the universe and that happenings in Italy were apt only to receive prominence in the British Press when something extravagant was said or done. This confession of my colleague always seemed to me to be particularly interesting and even important, because it meant that one more Italian had seen through the ridiculous Fascist supposition that nothing could occur in Italy without producing world-wide repercussions. Signor Mussolini, of course, soon became a well-known figure. But the portraits given of him have been too often either grossly flattering or the reverse, while most of his colleagues are scarcely known even by name to the general public. It may, therefore, be of use if I give some quite brief impressions of a few of those Italians who, with Signor Mussolini, are mainly responsible for having brought their country into her present disastrous situation. The blame, according to Mr. Churchill, rests exclusively upon Signor Mussolini. There is no reason to quarrel with the essential truth of that judgement. But clearly the dictum must not be interpreted too baldly and literally, and some part of the responsibility must fall upon those who not only did not oppose, but in one or the other capacity actively aided and abetted Signor Mussolini in his ruinous policy.

Few people, I imagine, whatever their personal feelings towards Signor Mussolini may be, will gainsay that he is an extraordinary man. He has shown himself to be exactly what the ancient Greeks meant by the word *ποικίλος*,



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A man so various that he seemed to be  
Not one, but all mankind's epitome.

The hackneyed words of Dryden give an accurate enough picture of his remarkable versatility. It is true that in many of his activities Signor Mussolini cut a very fifth-rate figure. His novel *The Cardinal's Mistress*, a typically cynical and anti-religious title, is rubbish and was never referred to in the best Fascist society. His playing on the violin is thoroughly mediocre, and he himself would be the first to admit that, politics apart, he would not find a place in any orchestra conducted by Arturo Toscanini. His lawn-tennis is unmitigated "bumble-puppy". But what else, in common fairness to the man, could you very well expect? Here was a man who came to power in his fortieth year after a hard struggle for his very existence in his early days. He had not had either the time or means for sport. Once in power he had money to spend upon all sorts of pursuits. This is not to say that he dipped his fingers dishonestly into the public till. He has generally the reputation of not caring for money. But money now came to him. His articles, syndicated in the American Press, were highly paid. The circulation of the *Popolo d' Italia*, the newspaper he had founded, went up, and prudent business men found it advisable to place with it frequent and expensive advertisements. Busy man because he was, Signor Mussolini rigidly mapped out his daily life so as not to waste one precious minute. He found time to learn English and to improve his smattering of French and German. He learned to ride a motor-cycle and to drive a motor-car at a high speed. He learned to pilot an aeroplane. He learned to ride a horse and to put his mare at reasonably high jumps. He took frequent lessons in fencing. He went in for winter sports. He was a keen swimmer. At more than one of these forms of sport he attained a respectable proficiency; enough proficiency, at any rate, to cause the utmost anguish and discomfort to some of his intimate collaborators whom he compelled to follow in his footsteps and at whose panting struggles he laughed heartily when they were being put through their paces before him by the ever-obsequious Party Secretary of the day, Signor Starace.

Signor Mussolini, in fact, is, or was, a man of enormous vitality and energy. His body, if ungainly, was powerful. Some of the outlets for his abundant energies were less creditable. Not even the most fulsome Fascist adulation has ever presumed to describe him as a bigoted monogamist. Not that he was, according to his code, a bad family man. His wife, Donna Rachele, remained very much in the back-

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ground. But in Italy even to-day many women lead what English women would regard as very old-fashioned existences, and whether it was her or his or a joint wish that she should not take that prominent place in social life which the wife of a British Prime Minister can scarcely avoid, the decision was eminently wise. With all her sound qualities Donna Rachele was not fitted to become a political hostess. But Signor Mussolini, in spite of his infidelities, had a genuine regard for the mother of his children. What part women have really played in his life is an open question. I very much doubt whether, with possibly one or two exceptions, any of his numerous lady-loves have counted for much, and even for those he was not the man to commit follies. "*Insomma è un uomo esuberante*" ("Well, well, he is an exuberant man") was the verdict of a worldly old Monsignore with whom I was once discussing this point during a luncheon to which he had invited me in his apartment in the Vatican. Signor Mussolini, according to a high Fascist official whom I met at a dinner-party, was not interested in "nice", highly-cultured and high-born ladies. He liked something young, vivacious and not too difficult to conquer. And when he was tired of her he left her and went on to the next. His work did not suffer because he was sighing for the moon. If it did suffer in recent years from women it was rather because in his private as in his public life he obstinately refused to acknowledge the passing of his youth. Meanwhile he kept his wife and family altogether apart from all such escapades. Some writers have declared that there is no tender place in Signor Mussolini's whole composition, and that he has never been seen to be moved or to be manfully hiding emotion. That is not true. Signor Mussolini was genuinely attached to his brother Arnaldo, and when the news of his brother's sudden death was broken to him by Ciano *père*, he broke down completely and wept upon his friend's shoulder. Many of my colleagues were also witnesses with me of a Signor Mussolini completely unmanned. The occasion was a sort of house-warming given by Dr. Hodel, for many years President of the Foreign Press Association in Rome, in the new quarters provided in the Via della Mercede for foreign correspondents. Signor Mussolini had promised to come together with the Minister of Public Culture, i.e. the chief propaganda merchant; at that time, if I remember rightly, Signor Alfieri. It so happened that Signor Mussolini's youngest daughter, Anna Maria, had been desperately ill and had just turned the corner. After a few words of welcome, then, Dr. Hodel congratulated Signor Mussolini on his child's recovery, and, taking a large parcel off the top

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of our grand piano, asked him to accept from the Foreign Press Association the gift to his little daughter of a doll. This kindly gesture came as a complete surprise to Signor Mussolini. The tears welled up into his eyes and trickled down his cheeks as he turned to the Minister accompanying him and whispered, "You must answer this speech, I cannot."

My private interviews tête-à-tête with Signor Mussolini were only four or five during the eleven years or so that I represented *The Times* in Italy. He was much more ready to grant interviews to special correspondents than to the permanent Rome correspondents. This was rather hard luck on those of us who followed his policy day by day and naturally could put more searching questions than our nomadic colleagues. But there was a reason for this. Signor Mussolini knew that if he made important declarations to, say, me, he would immediately have requests from all my companions. The same policy, I may add, was also followed in the Vatican. While Cardinal Gasparri, that friend to generations of diplomats accredited to the Holy See, was still Cardinal Secretary of State, he was approached on my behalf by more than one of our Ministers and he always returned the same answer. He realized the importance of *The Times* being fully informed about the Roman Catholic Church and he did not doubt the discretion of its representative, but such meetings, even if purely informatory and intended only for my guidance, would inevitably become known in the Vatican and would lead to a spate of similar requests from other journalists. On one occasion, however, Signor Mussolini deliberately welcomed an interview with me, the circumstances of which turned out to be unexpectedly interesting. I had written for *The Times* a long "turn-over" article in October 1932 reviewing the salient features of the first ten years of the Fascist regime. The article was intended for publication on October 28th, the anniversary of the March on Rome. But *The Times* published it about ten days in advance, and the next thing I knew was that Count Grandi, then recently appointed Ambassador in London, had sent a complimentary message to Printing House Square but had pointed out that, though Italy was a Corporative State, the article had said nothing about the Corporations. Count Grandi suggested that I should get in touch with the Minister of Corporations (then Signor Mussolini) and write another article for publication on October 28th. As a matter of fact the Corporative machinery was at that date virtually non-existent and I had purposely omitted reference to it. However, I sent in my request, and, after a short delay,

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received the reply that Signor Mussolini would see me at 6 P.M. on October 28th, of all surprising and exceptionally busy days. After we had discussed my request Signor Mussolini suddenly said to me that he supposed that I, like many other foreigners, imagined that half the population was languishing in prison or was in *confino* on one of the islands. When I had answered that I had not put the proportion quite as high as all that, Signor Mussolini picked up a sheet of note-paper, the only paper on his desk, turned it round and told me with a smile to read it. It contained a classified total of all the people then detained for various political and other offences; the length of their terms of detention and imprisonment, and the number which it was proposed to release under an impending amnesty to celebrate the occasion. I remarked that this was very interesting, took out a note-book and copied out all the figures, Signor Mussolini himself pointing out to me such statistics as he found most noteworthy. He was in a high good humour that evening, and when I left he accompanied me across his vast office to the door with one hand on my shoulder. As I took a final farewell I luckily said that I presumed that I was authorized to publish the figures he had shown me. *Per carità*, he exclaimed in genuine alarm, you mustn't do that. You, I and the Chief of the Police are the only three people who have yet seen that list and I shall get into a frightful row with the King if His Majesty learns of this through *The Times*. I pointed out that after all he had gone out of his way to show me the list and that he alone would have been to blame if I had wired the information to London. I promised, however, not to do this, but suggested that at least I might send a brief message about the amnesty. This he agreed to, and, after I had done so, I took up the list to Sir Ronald Graham at the British Embassy and he sent it that same night to the Foreign Office.

This episode always stuck in my memory as illustrating Signor Mussolini's strange impetuosity and, at the same time, the outward deference in formalities which he always manifested towards the King. It also revealed to me how different was the natural behaviour of Signor Mussolini in private life from the artificial pose which he adopted in public. David Garrick was described in the well-known lines of Goldsmith as constantly acting in private life and as being natural only on the stage. Signor Mussolini is the exact reverse of Garrick. When alone he was unaffected and, so far as I can judge, not unready to listen to argument and criticism. In public he was constantly posing. He swaggered and strutted. He thrust out his chin, as though he were

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accustomed to swallowing a couple of bulldogs every morning for his breakfast. He tore about in a constant hurry with the aim of making everybody forget that he was born in 1883. He was impatient of all opposition, of any hint of independence of judgement. He was exacting in his standard of the deference due to him as *Capo del Governo* and *Duce del Fascismo*. If the public was not inclined spontaneously to manifest its joy at his appearance, then cheers must be raised for him by the *claque* of his attendant Ministers and officials and by the accompanying band of plain-clothes detectives masquerading, according to circumstances, as agricultural labourers or bricklayers, factory hands or "supers" at some cinema film rehearsal. No doubt this was all play-acting, but no Sarah Battle was ever more insistent on the rigour of the game than Signor Mussolini showed himself to be in public. He was extraordinarily quick to sense the atmosphere of his audience. When his reception was spontaneously enthusiastic he was all smiles and hearty friendliness and condescension. From a listless and bored public he hurried away in offended dudgeon.

Upon those of his collaborators whose work brought them most closely into touch with him Signor Mussolini has produced the most diverse impressions. There are those who professed that they would cheerfully go through fire for his sake, who regarded him as a Superman, who asked nothing more than to be allowed to serve his immediate purpose and to be cast aside when that purpose had been served. There were the sycophants of the Press who never referred to Him except with a capital letter. Even Pius XI was led at one moment to describe him as the "Man of Providence". Upon others he has made anything but this wholly favourable impression. One intimate collaborator<sup>1</sup> has described him as by turns

"cynical and sentimental, impulsive and cautious, irritable and calm, generous and cruel, quick to decide and slow to move, uncompromising and conciliatory. All the qualities of heart and mind have in him contradictory aspects, but in his activities as Head of the Government and of the Fascist Party the tendencies which predominate are duplicity, superficiality and improvisation."

Another portrait<sup>2</sup> shows him as above all "a force". The elements of this force

<sup>1</sup> Signor Cesare Rossi, once a sub-editor on the *Popolo d' Italia*, and, after the March on Rome, for nearly two years head of Signor Mussolini's Press Bureau. Suspected but not convicted of having been implicated in the Matteotti murder.

<sup>2</sup> By Giuseppe Prezzolini.

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"are grouped round one central point, will-power. Compared with this, his intellectual qualities, though they are by no means to be despised, take second place. He is more intelligent than profound, quicker to grasp than coherent in creation, more synthetical than analytical in his judgement. He grasps ideas and the values of men with extraordinary rapidity, but the ones as well as the others take second place in his mind to the action which he has undertaken. That explains the quick passage from appreciation to depreciation of men and ideas. Everything in him is concentrated on the ends which he wishes to attain. His eminently strong-willed nature makes him above all alien to the liberal idea."

Gritting his teeth and scratching the back of his chair with the nails of his powerful hands, Signor Mussolini once told an admirer that his great ambition was to leave a permanent mark upon History. That he has already achieved this ambition cannot be doubted. But whether this impression will prove as deep as he and his toadies liked to think is a different story. The anecdote is, however, not without its moral. If one shuts one's eyes to crimes such as the Matteotti murder, once described by him as an "idiotic episode", the exact degree of his responsibility<sup>1</sup> for which it is difficult to determine, it might perhaps have been possible at one period to argue that Signor Mussolini, with all his shortcomings and worse, was a genuine patriot and did what he did for the greater glory of his beloved Italy. No such charitable view is now open to us. Signor Mussolini stands before the world convicted of having wantonly betrayed his country into the hands of her traditional enemy and of having befouled his career with a record of lies, treachery and unscrupulous aggression second only, if second at all, to that of his friend and accomplice, Herr Hitler. His lust for power, his overweening ambition, his brutal and cynical egoism in public affairs have made him the destroyer of his people.

It would probably surprise and shock His Majesty Victor Emmanuel III, King of Italy and Albania, Emperor of Abyssinia, to find himself classed, as he has often been classed, as the first of Signor Mussolini's aiders and abettors.<sup>2</sup> There have been many and consistent reports

<sup>1</sup> Probably on a par with that of Henry II for the murder of Thomas à Becket.

<sup>2</sup> Although King Victor Emmanuel was undoubtedly privy to and even encouraged the plot that overthrew Signor Mussolini, the odds are that he was a passive rather than an active agent. While then he should be credited with having finally stood up to Signor Mussolini, there seems no reason to modify the following appreciation of his character which was written before July 25th.

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that the members of the House of Savoy, in their hearts of hearts, disliked the upstart founder of Fascism. That may well be so. They had little enough reason to be grateful to him. Formally, as was pointed out earlier in this chapter, Signor Mussolini was deferential to the King and to the Royal Family. He thrust upon His Majesty an additional petty kingdom and an Empire. He forced another member of the House to accept, though he failed to compel him to mount, the throne of Croatia. He smiled upon the marriage of the Prince of Piedmont with the daughter of King Albert of Belgium, and upon that of the Princess Giovanna with King Boris of Bulgaria. But this outward deference, the House of Savoy must have felt, did not go very deep. Up to within a very few weeks of the March on Rome, Signor Mussolini had always been an avowed opponent of the Monarchy. The prospect of power and of personal aggrandizement turned Saul into St. Paul. Signor Mussolini suddenly and appropriately saw the light at Udine on September 20th, 1922, that is to say in the capital of a redeemed Province and on the anniversary of the Capture of Rome in 1870 by the royal troops who breached the walls near the Porta Pia and drove the Pope into the Vatican.

"I think", he said, "that it is possible to renew the regime in a profound way without touching the monarchy. Mazzini himself, republican and master of republican doctrines, did not consider these doctrines incompatible with a monarchical pact for Italian unity. He submitted. He accepted. It was not his ideal, but one cannot always realize ideals. We will, therefore, leave the institution of the monarchy out of our play, which will have other more obvious and more formidable goals. We will also leave it aside because a great part of Italy would look with suspicion on a transformation of the regime which went as far as that. We would perhaps have regional separatism. At bottom I do not think that the monarchy has any interest in putting obstacles in the way of what at last must be called the Fascist Revolution. It is not in its interests, because if it did it would at once become a target, and, once a target, it is certain that we should not be able to spare it, since it would be for us a question of life or death. Why are we republicans? Because in a certain sense we see a monarchy that is not sufficiently monarchical. The monarchy should represent the historic continuity of the nation. . . . We must avoid the Fascist Revolution putting everything to the hazard. We must not give the impression to the people that everything must tumble and that everything must be rebuilt. One thing that must be done is, however, clear: the demolition of the whole Socialist-Democratic superstructure."

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This pronouncement was typical. It contained the now familiar admixture of threats and churlish blandishments. Signor Mussolini had not really changed his sentiments, but he had come to realize that the House of Savoy commanded more loyalty in the fighting Services and among the people at large than he had thought. He saw that the Crown would be a valuable symbol to the United Italy now enlarged by its new provinces, and that, by the retention of the Throne, his coming revolution would not only acquire an existence *de jure* as well as *de facto* but would also avoid difficulties with foreign States and would not be endangered by internal cleavages. Not the least advantage would be that he would not antagonize many of those powerful industrialists upon whose support he largely counted.

Now King Victor Emmanuel III, whatever his shortcomings, has never been suspected of any lack of physical courage. He had had a stern and austere upbringing in accordance with the code and traditions of the sober and militaristic Piedmontese ruling class. When he was suddenly brought to the throne in 1900 by the murder of King Umberto he created a good impression by the courage of his first speech.

"Unafraid and sure," he concluded, "I ascend the throne, conscious of my rights and of my duties as a King. Let Italy have faith in me as I have faith in the destinies of our country, and no human force shall destroy that which with self-sacrifice our fathers builded."

Immediately upon the entry of Italy into the Great War in 1915 the King left for the front and remained there continuously until the end came in November 1918. He led, as he always has done, a frugal and simple life, spending long days among his troops and visiting the wounded. After the disaster of Caporetto he was unflinching in his determination that Italy should vindicate her good name. Mr. Lloyd George has given the following picture of *Il Re Soldato*, as he is so frequently called, when there was an inter-Allied meeting at Peschiera on November 8th, 1917:

"Physically he is not a commanding figure, but I was impressed by the calm fortitude he showed on an occasion when his country and his throne were in jeopardy. He exhibited no signs of fear or depression. His sole anxiety seemed to be to remove any impression that his army had run away. He was full of excuses but not of apologies for this retreat."

The King said he was sorry that Mr. Lloyd George's advice of using the Italian campaign to crush Austrian resistance had not been taken.



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Mr. Lloyd George said he was sorry the King had not been at a recent Conference. The King agreed, but pointed out that he did not always have the chance of getting his views carried out. The King remained cheerful throughout the meeting.

For the rest the King was a good husband and father and a quiet unobtrusive gentleman who infinitely preferred to be on his country estate at San Rossore, near Pisa, than to be in Rome. His State residence, the Quirinal Palace, saw him as little as possible, for when he was in his capital his true home was on the outskirts of Rome. He enjoyed fishing and shooting, but his real delight was in his collection of coins. His *Corpus Nummorum Italicorum* is a monumental work, beautifully printed and illustrated. On this he has spent years of happy and meticulous labour. In his public life he always acted, according to his lights, as a constitutional monarch, such part as he played in politics being played as far as possible behind the scenes. His sense of duty alone compelled him to appear in public more often than he would otherwise have done owing to his natural shyness and to a certain inferiority complex born of his diminutive stature. The monarchy, as Signor Mussolini so aptly put it, was not sufficiently monarchical.

Where all the relevant facts are not known it is impossible for a foreigner to dogmatize over the part played by the King in October 1922. The strictly orthodox explanation is that he kept his head better and was more far-seeing than his Ministers, and that his shrewd decision to summon Signor Mussolini spared his country the horrors of civil war. The most crudely unfavourable view is that he simply betrayed the Constitution he had sworn to uphold. Between these two poles there are many degrees of varying opinion. One view is that the King was merely concerned to preserve his crown. He saw, so runs this theory, that if he signed the decree declaring a state of siege he might save his country from Fascism but that he would almost certainly be dethroned. Whether the monarchy would be swept away altogether was not certain, since it was rumoured that the Duke of Aosta (father of the present Duke) was the Fascist candidate. Another view was that the King misjudged the strength of Fascism and refused to believe Marshal Badoglio when he guaranteed to smash the movement with a whiff of grape-shot. Others again have made out that the King, then barely 53, was a man already worn out by his heavy responsibility and depressed by an incurable form of neurasthenia. Yet another explanation is that the King imagined that Signor Mussolini, if allowed enough rope, would soon hang himself, and that after a brief

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but unpleasant interlude the House of Savoy would come into its own again. Be all this as it may, what cannot be gainsaid is that the King, having once refused to sign a Ministerial decree, did nothing for twenty years but sign along the dotted line, even to the detriment of his own prerogatives and of his House. In 1928 the Fascist Grand Council set itself up as "the supreme constitutional organ which coordinates and integrates all the activities of the regime". This body was to be summoned whenever Signor Mussolini saw fit. The opinion of the Council, it was laid down, "should be heard on every political, economic and social question of national interest, upon which it may be interrogated by the Duce, and upon all questions of a constitutional character and therefore also as regards the succession to the throne". By accepting this innovation the King, it has commonly been assumed, signed away the birthright of his only son. The Prince of Piedmont was at that date popularly supposed to be violently antagonistic to Signor Mussolini personally and to Fascism, and this was thought to be Signor Mussolini's method of drawing the Prince's teeth. Roman tittle-tattle even went to the absurd length of saying that the two men had fought a duel. Whether the Prince's succession was ever so menaced has always seemed to me personally to be arguable. It seems reasonable to hold that, where there was a rightful heir in the direct line, there could be no plausible excuse for the voice of the Fascist Grand Council being heard and that its opinion would only be asked in exceptional circumstances. It has, however, to be admitted that newspaper editors were at one period instructed not to refer to the Prince of Piedmont as the *Principe Ereditario*, and that it was only after many years, at the beginning of January 1943, that a broadcaster spoke of him once again as the Crown Prince.

But whatever the doubts about the status of the Prince, there is no doubt whatever that at the same time the King signed away his constitutional liberty of making a free choice of a successor to Signor Mussolini as Prime Minister.

"The Grand Council," it was declared, "on the proposal of the Duce draws up and keeps up to date the list of names to be presented to the Crown for the nomination, when the vacancy occurs, of his successor; and it draws up also and keeps up to date the list of persons whom, in case of vacancies, it considers suitable to assume the functions of Government."

The list of "shadow" Prime Ministers was understood to consist of three names, kept in a sealed envelope. Thus the King's choice had been

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rigidly restricted. These are, perhaps, the two most flagrant examples of the violence done to the *Statuto* by Fascism with the connivance of the King. It is, however, widely believed that the King has on many occasions signed decrees against his own better judgement and inclinations, and there is little question but that the King's submission to the demands of his masterful Prime Minister has disappointed, and weakened the affection of, many of his subjects. One conspicuous example of His Majesty's support of Signor Mussolini was furnished at the time of the murder of the young Socialist Deputy, Matteotti, on June 10th, 1924. This foul deed sent a shudder of horror through Italy. Signor Mussolini himself was green with terror at the prospect of being flung out of power and of the whole Fascist movement being swept away with him into limbo. Only an enemy, he tried to argue, could have done him this evil turn. When Signor Giovanni Amendola, the Liberal leader who was soon to fall a victim in his turn to Fascist brutality, went to the King he is said to have received the assurance that, if authentic proofs of Signor Mussolini's complicity were produced, His Majesty would do his duty. A mass of evidence was, in fact, collected by the Opposition. But while the Opposition was laboriously building up its case and acting with scrupulous legality, Signor Mussolini was busily pulling himself and his shaken myrmidons together. Meanwhile the King outwardly did nothing. And so on January 3rd, 1925, not quite seven months after the murder, Signor Mussolini strode confidently into a Chamber in which only Fascists were present and delivered a famous oration in which he assumed full responsibility for everything that had happened and challenged anybody who had anything against him to bring him to trial. Tumultuous applause. The challenge was not accepted. With the King lying as low and as silent as Brer Rabbit the public found no champion. Signor Mussolini consequently was now more firmly in the saddle than before. Any surviving ideas of collaboration with Parties other than the absorbed Nationalist Party, were finally discarded. Henceforth Italy was to be under a totalitarian Fascist regime, and Signor Mussolini was to be its permanent dictator.

Prince Umberto has not been unaffected by the loss of prestige of the Crown. As a young man he had been a popular idol. Tall, well-built and good-looking, the *Principino*, as he was affectionately called, was a general favourite. The ladies loved him and he loved the ladies. For a little time after his marriage he appeared to lose some of his popularity. Some heads were shaken, and by no means flattering

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comparisons were drawn between him and the young Duke of Aosta who died so prematurely as a British prisoner of war. But when a family came to him and the Princess of Piedmont, and when the Prince showed that he was taking his military responsibilities seriously, he won back much of the affections of the people. He was, however, in something of a dilemma. The more he devoted himself to his military duties the more he incurred the disapproval of those people who saw in the increasingly important posts conferred upon him a proof that the Prince in his turn had gone over to the Fascist camp. The position of an Heir Apparent is proverbially ticklish, and we should perhaps leave it at that. When so stout an anti-Fascist as Signor Paolo Treves can take so charitable and dispassionate a view of the King's actions,<sup>1</sup> a foreigner must be chary of his judgements, particularly as regards a Prince who has not yet been called upon to assume the final responsibilities of a Head of the State. England is not the only country where a Prince Hal has developed into a King Henry. His cool demeanour when an attempt was made upon his life in Brussels just before his marriage showed that he has inherited all the physical courage of his House. He may also prove to have moral courage and a political flair. It has yet to be determined what exactly lay behind the rapid military advancement that he has recently had. It may have been due to genuinely meritorious service and to the fact that, as the years pass, he is increasingly becoming the representative of the King as the royal head of the Army. It may have been due to Signor Mussolini's recognition of his own waning prestige and to a desire to shelter behind the House of Savoy and reacquire the confidence of the armed forces. It may have been due to fear of the Throne and to a Machiavellian design to implicate the monarchy in the further disasters already looming ahead, and so to save Fascism and his own skin amidst the general wreckage. As the failure of Signor Mussolini's regime grew more and more patent, reports of the Court moving cautiously behind the scenes and coquetting with the less extremist and more Conservative elements within the Fascist Party grew increasingly numerous and widespread. There can be no reasonable doubt now that these reports were true. One significant feature of the crisis was the attempted rehabilitation of the King. Attention was concentrated upon him, while the Crown Prince remained in the background. There was political wisdom in this. As devout Roman Catholics the Prince and Princess of Piedmont can count upon all the political experience and influence of the Vatican

<sup>1</sup> *Italy Yesterday, To-day, To-morrow*, by Paolo Treves. Gollancz, 1942.

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being put unreservedly at their disposal. This would be an invaluable trump card. Should the republican elements persist in regarding the King as hopelessly compromised by Fascism the Vatican might yet save the Monarchy for Prince Umberto and his son.

Signor Mussolini's aiders and abettors have been numerous. This is the natural consequence of his practice of "changing the guard". Partly with a view to grooming promising collaborators for other posts, partly because certain appointments were made *ad hoc*, and partly because there could not be two suns in his solar system, Signor Mussolini frequently made changes amongst his principal lieutenants. This practice applied even to the *Quadrumviri*, the four men who were credited with being the leaders of the March on Rome, though Signor Mussolini could not afford to leave them without employment as he did for longer or shorter periods his other supporters. Of these *Quadrumviri* Signor Michele Bianchi died not so very many years after the advent to power of Fascism. Marshal Balbo was killed in 1940. Marshal De Bono is now too old to count for much. Count De Vecchi, since he was recalled from Rhodes, has sunk into obscurity, though in July 1943 he was put in command of a Division in Sicily. There is no reason, therefore, to concern ourselves with the remaining two members of the *Quadrumvirato*. But, if they can be left out of account, Count Grandi, who acted as Chief of Staff to the *Quadrumvirs*, is still a young man with whom one must reckon. Of all the leading Fascists Dino Grandi is personally the best known in England because he was for several years Ambassador at the Court of St. James. Tall and distinguished-looking, intelligent and with charming manners, Count Grandi became a popular figure in London Society. He had been sent on many missions and had filled with success the post of Foreign Minister before he came to London as Ambassador in 1932 at the age of 37. When in 1921 the Fascist Party showed signs of fatal disruption and Signor Mussolini even resigned his leadership in protest against the unruliness of many of the local leaders, it was Signor Grandi (he became a Count in 1937) who declared that all the Black Shirts would unite and form "one solid block of granite". Signor Grandi was, in fact, in those days anything but the suave diplomat he afterwards trained himself to be, and some sober-minded people apparently accept as true the story that he admitted to having shot many political opponents with his own hand when he was the Fascist "Ras" of Bologna. Signor Mussolini owed a great deal to Signor Grandi in many ways. It was Signor Grandi who with Count De Vecchi undertook

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in October 1922 the task of persuading the Government and the King to invite Signor Mussolini to form a Cabinet. There is reason to believe that at the Stresa Conference in April 1935 Signor Grandi warned his leader that Great Britain would not turn a blind eye upon his projected attack on Abyssinia. During the meetings of the Non-Intervention Committee in London in the earlier stages of the Spanish Civil War Signor Grandi showed great ingenuity in defending his Government and had several clashes with Lord Plymouth and M. Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador. Finally Count Grandi is thought to have warned Signor Mussolini that, whatever Herren Hitler and Ribbentrop might say, Great Britain and France would not watch passively the destruction of Poland by Germany. Altogether, therefore, Count Grandi has been one of the most active of the Fascist leaders, and neither the leading part he played in the overthrow of Signor Mussolini nor his charm of manner should be allowed to obliterate all memories of certain aspects of his past career.

A man to be taken far less seriously is Count Galeazzo Ciano, Signor Mussolini's son-in-law. His father, Admiral Costanzo Ciano, Count of Cortellazzo, performed various spectacular exploits in small motor-launches during the Great War and was an early supporter of Fascism. The family had made money out of shipping, and Count Galeazzo Ciano is generally credited with having increased enormously an already considerable fortune. He was, therefore, much more prosperous by birth than the majority of Fascist leaders. Having taken his degree in jurisprudence at Rome University he entered the diplomatic service. His rise was rapid and, after his marriage to Edda Mussolini in 1930, became meteoric. He returned from Shanghai to become head of Signor Mussolini's Press Department, and soon afterwards was made Minister of Propaganda. He took part as an airman in the Abyssinian campaign with the rank of major, and in June 1936 was named Minister of Foreign Affairs at the age of 33. This appointment caused much public discontent and jealousy and was, in fact, the most flagrant instance of nepotism. Count Ciano did not, in some ways, do so badly as might have been feared. He is intelligent and quick, with a pleasantly boyish manner. This manner is the true index of his character. Important as his post was, and serious as were the issues with which he had to cope, Count Ciano has never yet settled down to be really "serious". He is essentially the play-boy, happier on the shore of the seaside at Ostia or out at the Rome Golf Club, or happier still in pursuit of some love affair than he ever was at his desk in the Palazzo

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Chigi. Roman scandal has been as busy with his name as with that of Countess Ciano. As Foreign Minister he undertook many journeys abroad which the risk of assassination made inexpedient for Signor Mussolini, and, if report speaks true, his incurable frivolity offended several of his hosts. He certainly was never liked either by Herr Hitler or Herr Ribbentrop and it is most probable that his heart was never in the German alliance which he signed in Berlin in May 1939. Undeniably high words passed between him and his German hosts at Salzburg in the August of that year when he found that Herr Hitler was determined on war. The story was current in Rome soon afterwards that Herr Hitler had flown into a rage at Count Ciano's demurrings to his proposals and had told him that he was a fool, that he was born a fool and would die a fool. The photographs published in the Italian Press whenever Herr Ribbentrop came to Rome were highly enlightening. Whereas with other visitors Count Ciano was shown as smiling and attentive, with Herr Ribbentrop he was glum and saw as little of him as possible. His transfer after over six years at the Palazzo Chigi to the Italian Embassy to the Holy See aroused great speculation. Time alone will show whether the appointment, which ended with the Fascist regime, was merely made to provide a dignified escape for a son-in-law whom Signor Mussolini found to be no longer a whole-hearted collaborator and executor of his policy, or whether it was made so as to build a bridge across the Tiber to a sovereign State which, as its rulers hope, may yet help to promote the restoration of peace. Count Ciano, taken all in all, is a light weight, but he is not too light not to have taken a thoroughly discreditable share in the thoroughly discreditable and treacherous annexation of Albania.

Next after Count Grandi and Count Ciano the Italian probably best known in this country, at least by name, is Signor Virginio Gayda, for nearly twenty years editor and chief leader-writer of the *Giornale d' Italia*, and a frequent contributor to goodness only knows how many other publications. To me personally Signor Gayda was always an accessible and helpful colleague. He is a man who can speak or read several languages; who has travelled; who has read much; has a good memory; is an indefatigable worker, and writes at a great pace, rattling out his articles on a typewriter almost as fast as a machine-gunner runs through a belt of cartridges. Signor Gayda was for many years regarded as the special mouthpiece of Signor Mussolini. This has often been denied. The fact none the less remains that Signor Gayda was

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one of the best-informed men in Italy and was in constant touch with all the members of the Government. Many Italians will tell you that Signor Gayda was not at heart a true Fascist. By this they mean that he was not a violent extremist and that he had no brutal past to live down. But Signor Gayda served the Fascist regime faithfully and well. On one occasion when I expressed my surprise at one of his articles Signor Gayda told me quite candidly that he regarded himself as a regular servant of the regime. A lawyer, he said in effect, is not concerned with the justice of his client's case. He is not concerned with the innocence or guilt of a man whom he is defending against a charge of murder. He has his brief and it is his business to do the best he can for his client. I regard myself in the light of a lawyer. This explanation accounts for many of Signor Gayda's articles, as it also helps to explain his apparent omniscience. The materials of many of his articles were supplied to him by the Government or the Party, and he docilely put his name at the bottom after having touched them up to the required degree. Occasionally he permitted himself to take a line of his own which turned out not to be favoured in high places. He was an adept in wriggling out of such awkward situations, and the dexterity of some of his recantations provoked the admiration and amusement of his journalistic colleagues. But he could be a good friend, and was ready to draw a distinction between the individual Briton and British policy. One of the finest compliments ever paid to a foreigner was that paid by Signor Gayda to the late Sir William McClure, a lifelong champion of Italy and for many years the Press Attaché at the British Embassy in Rome. Sir William was a well-known figure in Rome, as indeed he was everywhere, for he stood about 6 feet 8 inches high and had been known in his Oxford days as the "Pemmy Giant". He was for some years *The Times* Correspondent in Italy, spoke Italian (and several other languages) fluently, was extremely sociable and a brilliant conversationalist. On the day of his death the *Giornale d' Italia* came out with a single banner heading in large type "È MORTO McCCLURE", "McCCLure is dead". All the readers of Signor Gayda's newspaper were expected to know, and lament the death of their English friend. Writing as much and as fast as he does, Signor Gayda has no special gifts of literary style, but his Italian is clear and easy to follow and certainly does not fall into obscurity through undue compression. There was no better guide to Fascist political thought.

In some ways the exact antithesis of Count Ciano is Signor Giuseppe



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Bottai. Like most of his colleagues Signor Bottai was an early adherent to Fascism. Like most of his colleagues again he had taken part in the Great War, for the sake of fighting in which he interrupted his legal studies. But after the March on Rome Signor Bottai began to devote himself seriously to journalism and to the writing of books. His literary work has by no means been incompatible with devotion to the public service. He has been Minister of Corporations and of Education. He has been Governor of Rome. He has been Civil Governor of Addis Ababa. But first and foremost he is a thinker and writer. He was mainly responsible for the "School Charter" which brought the entire educational system more completely under Fascist control, and he had much to do with the "Labour Charter". Signor Bottai was one of the really able and intellectual members of the Fascist Party, and his review *Critica Fascista* was both temperate and outspoken. For a man who has done as much active service in peace and on the battlefield as he has, his writings are apt to be extremely abstract and metaphysical, though his literary style in itself is not involved. He is probably as much respected as any leading Fascist, but he will never be a really popular figure.

One of the best-known and most cordially disliked figures of Fascism is Roberto Farinacci. Originally a petty railway employee, Signor Farinacci somehow managed to qualify as a lawyer and took occasion once to state in his newspaper, the violent and much-quoted *Regime Fascista*, that he had built up his fortune out of his legal practice and not by corruption. From such mention as is made of him in this book his character can easily be inferred. A thorough-going tough, it was to him that Signor Mussolini turned for a Secretary of the Fascist Party when the whole movement had been endangered by the Matteotti murder. He did his job effectively and resigned in 1926, either because, with the complete disintegration of the Opposition, there was no longer any need for a man of his type or because he had become too deeply compromised by his polemics with Cardinal Gasparri. Signor Farinacci was made a Minister of State and a member of the Fascist Grand Council but was never a member of the Cabinet. Nevertheless he was always a prominent Fascist figure and he was always engaged in quarrelling over something. He was mainly responsible for originating the anti-Semitic campaign in Italy which he launched at the bidding of his German patrons. Signor Farinacci was, at least on paper, the principal champion of the German alliance in Italy, and it is commonly supposed that much of his funds came from German sources. Though

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always professing to be a good Roman Catholic, Signor Farinacci tilted many times at the Vatican and more particularly at the *Osservatore Romano*, the staff of which he was continually declaring to be pro-Jewish and anti-Italian. He was, in fact, never happy unless he was attacking somebody or something. As a rule he was attacking the presumed opponents of the Fascist regime, such as Marshal Badoglio or Count Dalla Torre, editor of the *Osservatore Romano*. But he was not afraid to criticize shortcomings in the Party itself, and he was one of the first to complain that the Corporative system had failed to regulate prices and ensure the supplies of food in war-time and that there was a danger of the poorer classes suffering starvation. His newspaper was distinguished by the violence of its vituperation against the British, and there is small doubt that his pro-German faction, instigated and paid by the Nazis, had a great deal to do with the wholesale changes in the Cabinet and in the Fascist Party administration which followed each other so quickly since the beginning of 1943.

Signor Scorza, like his friend Signor Farinacci, was destined inexorably to be swept away with the fall of Fascism. A native of Calabria, where he was born in 1897, Carlo Scorza was taken as a boy to the district of Lucca, with which he always remained identified. He fought in the Great War and was one of the earliest and most ruthless of the *squadristi*. The band which he organized was, in fact, known locally as the "*ghenga Scorza*", and this gang soon distinguished itself by the brutality with which it beat up its political opponents of all sorts. He took part in the March on Rome, and it was his toughs who, during the unrest following the Matteotti murder, set upon Signor Amendola, the Liberal leader, so severely that he died soon afterwards at Nice. These activities won him a place on the National Party Directorate. Signor Scorza came again into prominence when, soon after the Conciliation between Church and State, there was an embittered tussle between the Fascist Government and the Vatican over the Youth. His bands of trained young hooligans attacked priests, Roman Catholic newspapers and clubs, and members of the Catholic Youth organizations. Pope Pius XI and Signor Mussolini thundered at each other across the Tiber, and when finally peace was patched up Signor Scorza was sacrificed and disappeared into obscurity. According, however, to another version,<sup>1</sup> Signor Scorza's disgrace was due not so much to his priest-baiting as to his having swindled the *Credito Toscano* out of 6 million dollars. His disgrace at all events lasted long. It was only

<sup>1</sup> Given in the *Christian Science Monitor*.

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in October 1942 that he was allowed to write in the *Popolo d' Italia*, the Mussolini family newspaper, a signed article attacking the spread of pessimism. This was a clear sign that he was being restored to favour. Directly afterwards he was given a place again on the National Directorate, and in April 1943 he supplanted Signor Vidussoni as Secretary of the Fascist Party. His activities in this post are described in more detail elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> It is sufficient here to say that he is a man of violence and ruthlessness both in thought and in act. He did, however, show a sensible impatience of all the utterly superfluous and frequently obstructive bureaucracy that Fascist graft and "wangling" had built up round, and often in duplication of, the State Administration, and he did not hesitate to point out the dislike of responsibility, lack of initiative and wasteful incompetence of the pretentious jacks-in-office who were making lucrative careers out of the Party machinery. He had the courage too to stand up for the much-maligned *bourgeoisie*, largely upon whose shoulders, or rather upon whose banking accounts, Signor Mussolini and his followers had climbed into office. But when all is said and done Signor Scorza was one of the Farinacci camarilla, and his appointment in the place of Signor Vidussoni was warmly welcomed by Signor Farinacci as signifying that the intransigence of the Revolution was being stressed. A return was being made to the Old Guard who had preserved their original dynamic spirit, who were opposed to the very idea of compromise and a *fortiori* of an Italian capitulation, and who, at a moment of crisis, must be preferred to more moderate and adaptable men.

This brief list does not, of course, pretend to do more than give a few of the names of those who have been the instruments of Signor Mussolini's will. Others such as the old Nationalist, Signor Federzoni, formerly Minister of the Colonies and, until the crash, President of the Royal Academy; Count Volpi of Misurata, the wealthy industrialist who was Governor of Tripolitania and Minister of Finance; Senator Thaon di Revel, for several years Minister of Finance, owed their appointments not so much to their being keen Party men as to their suitability for the posts entrusted to them and to their willingness to place their talents at the disposition of their country. But the list of sketches, such as it is, should give some idea of a few typical men who rose to prominence under the Fascist regime and whose continuance in high places would inevitably engender suspicions of any regime purporting to have expelled the Fascist virus. Who the new leaders of

<sup>1</sup> Chapter Nine.

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Italy are going to be it is beyond anybody's powers to guess. Count Sforza, the former Foreign Minister and one of the earliest rebels against the Fascist regime; Professor Salvemini; Don Sturzo, once the powerful leader of the Roman Catholic *Partito Popolare*, are none of them as young as they were. But the years of their wandering in the wilderness have not been wasted. They have kept burning the torch of liberty and have gathered round themselves many disciples. There is, then, no reason to despair. Even though a reborn Italy has to suffer her growing pains this will only be natural. The new Rome will not be built in a day. Historical precedents suggest that several years will elapse after the fall of Fascism before the grain is sifted from the chaff.

## Chapter Seven

### ITALY'S WAR RECORD

A BRIEF outline has already been given<sup>1</sup> of the general type of warfare for which the three arms of the Italian forces were trained. Writing<sup>2</sup> on Italy's "war doctrine and spirit" General Pariani, at that time Under-Secretary of State for War, laid down the broad principle that a static war which sought to wear down the enemy was impossible for Italy, since such a policy was contrary both to the Fascist spirit and to the iron laws of Italian economy. The Italian war, he maintained, must be one of rapid movement and must seek to destroy the enemy in the briefest possible time. This was feasible because the Italian State and military organization depended upon the single inspiration and guidance of Signor Mussolini. General Pariani further stated that according to the Italian doctrine the Army should be flung at a vital objective, with the purpose of breaking through the enemy front and exploiting the success thus won. As to the spirit he pointed out that in 1915-18 calls had been made upon the negative, passive qualities of resistance, sacrifice, duty and obedience rather than upon the bubbling enthusiasm, initiative and joy of responsibility of the troops. The motto and spirit informing the Army of to-day should, he declared, be love of risk, joy of responsibility, daring and endurance, coupled with the Fascist slogans *credere*, *obbedire*, *combattere* (believe, obey, fight) and *vivere pericolosamente* (live dangerously). It was obviously in anticipation of being able to put these theories into practice that Signor Mussolini declared war upon Great Britain and France when he did. He imagined that he was hurling his country not so much into war as into a speedy and cheap victory. He reckoned that the imminent total collapse of France would be followed shortly by the surrender and disintegration of the British Empire, and that his armies would flaunt themselves on a brilliant parade through southern France and would then proceed at their leisure to enter into possession of vast, disarmed territories in Africa. Similarly with Greece four months later. Signor Mussolini expected that the Greek Government would either capitulate outright to his ultimatum or else, if some show of resistance were put up, that it would quickly be brought to an end and Italian prestige

<sup>1</sup> Chapter Four.

<sup>2</sup> In *Rassegna Italiana*, June 1939.

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throughout the Balkans gloriously and profitably enhanced.

These rosy anticipations were soon falsified. During the few days that elapsed before the capitulation the French armies in the south-east put up a tough resistance to the Italian advance, and the terms of the Franco-Italian Armistice did not put Italy in physical occupation of much of the coveted territory included in her loudly-trumpeted "aspirations". She gained not so much a foot- as a toe-hold in metropolitan France, and it was only when, as a reply to the Anglo-American landing in Algiers and Morocco, the Axis armies marched into the unoccupied zone of France on November 11th, 1942, that Italy was permitted to occupy Corsica and the French Riviera. Italy did, it is true, at the outset occupy British Somaliland and even crossed the frontiers of the Sudan and Kenya at certain points. But this success, which was due to our lack of resources, both human and material, was short-lived. In January 1941 British and Imperial forces, aided by Abyssinian patriots, advanced simultaneously into Abyssinia, Eritrea and Italian Somaliland. Although our troops were greatly inferior in numbers and artillery we were much better served in the air, and the Italians at once began a general retirement. The only serious resistance was made at Keren, where there was hard fighting before this strong Eritrean mountain fortress with its garrison of 40,000 men was captured on March 27th; at Amba Alagi, where the late Duke of Aosta surrendered with over 19,000 men on May 19th, and, after the rainy season had ended, at Gondar, which capitulated on November 27th, increasing our bag of prisoners by 23,500 men, of whom 11,500 were Italians. The Emperor Haile Selassie had re-entered Addis Ababa on May 5th. Thus in seventeen months from the declaration of war Italy had lost every shred of her East African Empire. Bitter Italian tongues said that henceforth Signor Mussolini should be known no longer as the *fondatore* (founder) but as the *affondatore* (sinker) of the Empire. I gather from participants in this campaign that in some places, notably before Keren, the Italians fought well, and that the individual soldier often displayed great courage. The trouble appears to have lain with the General Staff and the superior officers. If, for example, Keren had been skilfully defended its great strength should have made it virtually impregnable by our much smaller army. The Italians seem also to have been criminally remiss in not destroying their supplies of petrol, without our capture of which we should on occasion have had to hold up our advance.

The Greek campaign, so far from bringing Italy some much-needed

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*kudos*, nearly overwhelmed Signor Mussolini in shame. His ultimatum, delivered at 3 A.M. on October 28th, 1940 (the anniversary of the March on Rome), gave the Government of General Metaxas three hours in which to accept the demand that Greece should surrender unspecified strategic posts. It alleged that Greece was not observing even the barest duties of a neutral in spite of repeated Italian protests and warnings, and specifically accused Greece of having agreed to place at the disposal of Great Britain air bases in Thessaly and Macedonia for use in an attack on Albania. This blackmailing ultimatum was rejected by General Metaxas, and at 5.30, i.e. half an hour before its expiry, the Italian attack was launched across the Albanian border. At this moment Signor Mussolini had another meeting with Herr Hitler, this time in Florence. Doubt was expressed in some quarters whether Germany was an accomplice in this treacherous attack upon Greece. General Metaxas and his colleagues were convinced that she was. This seems more than likely. It was subsequently admitted that Balkan affairs were discussed at the fateful meeting on the Brenner held between Signor Mussolini and Herr Hitler on March 18th, 1940, and immediately after it a harsher and sinister note began to be sounded in Rome. In a speech delivered to the Chamber on the first anniversary of Italy's declaration of war Signor Mussolini declared that ever since August 1940 he had had proofs that Greece did not even preserve the pretence of neutrality. By October, he went on, the Yugoslav-Greek situation was such that, in the language of chemistry, it needed "decanting" to avoid unpleasant surprises, and "thus, on October 15th, it was unanimously decided to hesitate no longer and to launch the campaign before the end of the month".

The campaign exposed to the whole world the incompetence and miscalculations of the Fascist regime. In the speech just referred to Signor Mussolini tried to shuffle off some of the odium, contempt and ridicule which he had brought upon himself by saying that the plan of the C.-in-C. of the forces in Albania, General Visconti-Prasca, was "approved by the Rome High Command and by myself" and was "logical and convincing". He had made the same claim in a speech which he delivered in Rome on February 23rd, 1941, and which was obviously intended to answer the accusations that Italy had declared war without having made adequate preparations, and that not only the situation in Greece had been misjudged but the European situation as a whole had been misread in June 1940, when it was confidently anticipated that the war would last only a few weeks. In spite of Signor

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Mussolini's claim there was evidently a sharp division of military opinion at home. At the beginning of December 1940 it was announced in quick succession that Marshal Badoglio had resigned from his post as Chief of the General Staff, and that the resignations had also been accepted of Admiral Cavagnari, Chief of the Italian Navy Staff, and of General De Vecchi, Governor and Commander in the Dodecanese. In Albania changes of command were significantly frequent. Italian fortunes had, indeed, sunk to a low ebb. The Greeks, fighting with supreme gallantry and skill, had not only stemmed the Italian advance but had flung the invaders neck and crop out of their country and were trouncing them soundly in Albania. A brilliant attack by the Fleet Air Arm had on November 11th delivered a crippling blow to the main Italian Battle Fleet lying in Taranto harbour. General (as he then was) Wavell had forestalled Marshal Graziani and had launched a surprise attack which drove the remnants of the defeated Italian forces out of Egypt into Cyrenaica. The Italian air-men, for whom Signor Mussolini had begged Herr Hitler's permission that they might participate in the Battle of Britain, had been shot out of our skies and were hastily withdrawn. We do not yet know the details of the crisis. A special *communiqué* issued in Rome said that Italy, in entering the war, was aware that "difficult moments" were in store for her; that the changes in the High Command would accelerate the rhythm of the Italian war machine, and, finally, that "Mussolini and the Italian people know that they can trust each other". Signor Farinacci, the extremist editor of the *Regime Fascista* and a man always ready to jump into the breach on critical occasions, made a bitter and thinly veiled attack upon Marshal Badoglio. The Marshal was accused of failing to prepare adequately for the campaign against Greece and of attempting to shift the responsibility by lies. Someone, wrote Signor Farinacci, who should have remained silent is now asserting among his henchmen in the salons and hunt clubs that he disapproved of the Greek enterprise. It is puerile to try to shift the responsibility on to the political command, when it is obvious that the conduct of the war devolved exclusively upon professional soldiers. The Government has never been stingy to the Army, and we had the right to expect our armed forces to show the fullest efficiency at a time of testing. Signor Farinacci further went on to say that the Duce wanted collaborators better able to interpret his thoughts, and that he needed men who knew better how to put his plans into action and who understood better how to exploit the undeniable merit of the



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Italian troops. This attack, which was bitterly resented by Marshal Badoglio,<sup>1</sup> had a very depressing and bewildering effect upon public opinion. Not everybody, however, approved the Marshal's resignation. It was well known that he disliked the Fascist regime. At the time of the March on Rome he had offered the King to stop the whole movement with a regiment of soldiers and a few machine-guns. He had never even nominally joined the Fascist Party until honorary membership was forced upon him after his triumphant return from Addis Ababa. If, said his critics, he had felt so strongly about the Greek campaign, he should have resigned when it was being planned and not when Italy was the laughing-stock of Europe.

In boasting to the Chamber on June 10th, 1941, how the Greek resistance was ultimately overcome, Signor Mussolini tried to give the impression that the Italian troops had won their success despite the aid furnished by Great Britain, and he spoke as though the Germans had been engaged solely in crushing Yugoslavia. As a matter of fact the Germans had occupied Salonika on April 9th and threatened the Greek rear in Albania, thus enabling even the defeated Italian army to advance. Indeed when the Greeks realized that their position was hopeless they tried at first to surrender to the Germans, but were referred to the despised and hated Italians. As a sop to Signor Mussolini's wounded pride Herr Hitler, with contemptuous courtesy, allowed him to pose as the conqueror of Greece and to occupy the greater part of the country, Athens included. The moral obligation upon Great Britain to implement her guarantee to Greece had had one most unfortunate consequence. It had compelled the withdrawal of troops from General Wavell's army to meet the impending menace of a German invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece, and thus enabled a counter-offensive to be launched which, thanks mainly to German troops rushed to the rescue of the defeated Italians, regained in a few weeks nearly all the territory won by us during the winter. But what is of immediate interest here is the curious report which Marshal Graziani hastily sent to Rome towards the end of December 1940 in explanation of his defeat by General Wavell. To many minds it conveyed the impression that the Marshal in his turn also was trying to put the blame on to other shoulders, since he referred to orders and instructions

<sup>1</sup> The reputed text of Marshal Badoglio's rejoinder was reproduced in the Greek Press in March 1941. It was said to have been published originally by the *Tribuna* on December 23rd, 1940, in a single edition which was immediately suppressed.

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which he had received. Marshal Graziani's resignation was not formally announced in Rome until March 25th, 1941, when, at one and the same time, he ceased to be Chief of Staff of the Army, Governor of Libya and Commanding Officer of the Armed Forces in Northern Africa. But already in February rumours were current in Rome that he had, at the beginning of the year, denounced Signor Mussolini before a meeting of the Supreme War Council as responsible for the defeat. He was alleged to have made a long speech in which he disclaimed responsibility and to have placed upon the table the orders he had received from Signor Mussolini and copies of his replies in which he had vigorously opposed the strategical plan forced upon him. His arguments had, however, been brushed aside and he had only remained in command at Signor Mussolini's direct orders. Whether or not this report is true, and whatever basis there may have been for the further report that after this explosion Marshal Graziani was put under house arrest in Rome, there can be little doubt that at this period Italy was passing through a dangerous crisis and that Signor Mussolini's prestige and position were severely shaken. Part of the trouble seems to have lain in a recrudescence of the old jealousy between the Army and the Black Shirt Militia, many of whose officers proved to be thoroughly incompetent but of whom it was extremely difficult for the professional General commanding to rid himself. The attitude taken up by Marshals Badoglio and Graziani towards Signor Mussolini was, in short, not very dissimilar from that adopted by Nikias towards Kleon when, in the famous scene described by Thucydides, Nikias, baited beyond endurance by the strictures of that arch-demagogue, finally bade him go and take charge of the Athenian army himself. Military men of the regular army were often heard at this date<sup>1</sup> to remark with a certain malice that it was the Fascists' job to finish what they had begun.

No attempt is being made here to present even an epitome of the military operations undertaken by Italy. The ebb and flow of the offensives and counter-offensives which at one moment brought Marshal Rommel and the Axis armies almost within sight of Alexandria, only to be driven out of Egypt, out of Cyrenaica, out of Tripolitania and finally out of Tunisia, fall within the province of the military historian. It is enough here to say that, stiffened by the tank divisions of Marshal Rommel, the Italians rallied well from the catastrophic defeat inflicted upon Marshal Graziani. They could not

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, February 1st, 1941.

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afford to do otherwise. On June 22nd, 1941, Herr Hitler had made the mistake of committing Germany to an invasion of Russia, and he no longer had a large surplus of reserves upon which to draw if he received an SOS message from Signor Mussolini. The well-known German journalist, Herr Kircher, writing from Rome to the *Frankfurter Zeitung*,<sup>1</sup> subsequently pointed out that

"Italy stands or falls with the southern front of Europe. Even the greatest victory over the Bolsheviks could not make good Italy's position on the southern front if once it were lost. At the same time the Italians are aware that a collapse of the German eastern front would have been disastrous for Italy as well."

By common consent many of the Italian troops fought with courage, and were rewarded for their pains on more than one occasion by being left in the lurch by their German allies. Marshal Messe and his men held out longer in Tunisia than the troops under General von Arnim and up to the last offered a stout resistance to the redoubtable Eighth Army under General Montgomery. The Italian claim, however, that final surrender had come only when the last cartridge had been fired was quite untrue. Mr. Churchill declared in his address<sup>2</sup> to both Houses of Congress of May 19th, 1943, that

"the African excursion of the two Fascist Dictators has cost their countries in killed or captured 950,000 soldiers. In addition nearly 2,400,000 gross tons of shipping have been sunk and nearly 8,000 aircraft destroyed, both of these figures being exclusive of large numbers of ships and aircraft damaged. There have also been lost by the enemy 6,200 guns, and 2,550 tanks and 70,000 trucks."

On the following day, Mr. Eden gave some further figures to the annual conference of the Conservative Party and mentioned that the enemy had lost "a vast quantity of guns, ammunition, vehicles and other military equipment", thereby disproving the Italian boasts that they had only surrendered because they had no more supplies. Even more fatuous was the excuse<sup>3</sup> that the Axis troops had been facing "a superiority of 100 to one" in numbers. As the inevitable end of the campaign came more clearly into view the numbers of the Allies, as quoted in the Italian Press, grew as rapidly as those of Falstaff's men in buckram, and goodness only knows what astronomical figures they would not have reached if the Axis troops had managed to hold out much longer.

<sup>1</sup> February 26th, 1943.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, May 20th, 1943.

<sup>3</sup> *Popolo d' Italia*, May 12th, 1943.

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In comparison with the Great War there has certainly been comparatively little static warfare on any front, and to that extent the Italians were justified in training their men for a more open type of fighting. It cannot, however, be said that the Italians have markedly displayed those offensive qualities which General Pariani apparently expected to find in them. After they had once overrun British Somaliland they showed little enough "bubbling enthusiasm" or daring initiative, and after our advance in East Africa had begun they only punctuated their retreats by spasmodic stands. Marshal Graziani was superior in numbers, especially of mechanized units, at the outbreak of war, but until September he was held on the Egyptian frontier, and after he had advanced in great strength to Maktla he wasted his time and opportunity by constructing many fortified camps. In Greece, or rather Albania, the Italians were soon forced on to the defensive, and though Signor Mussolini went over to Albania in March 1941 when, as he said, he "felt victory in the air", his mere presence did not obliterate the stubborn Greek army, although the Italians had by now collected what he described as "a really imposing force". The Italians have, in short, done rather better on the defensive than on the offensive, though the British official pamphlet entitled *Destruction of an Army* contains several passages bearing witness to Marshal Graziani's bold use of his artillery, to the courage and dash of the motor-cyclists who headed his columns, and to individual cases of bravery. When Signor Mussolini made known at the beginning of March 1943 his withdrawal of his shattered Divisions from the dreaded Russian front his Order of the Day spoke of the innumerable proofs of "tenacity and worth" which they had given in fighting to the utmost limit against superior enemy forces, and he declared that "privations, sufferings and interminable marches" had put their physical and moral resistance to an exceptional test. Here again it is clear that the Italians had chiefly distinguished themselves on the defensive. In a famous definition the French natural historian, Buffon, wrote: "Cet animal est méchant; quand on l'attaque il se défend". So it was with too many of the Italian troops, who apparently had no stomach for an unpopular war and were not eager to carry the fight to the enemy.

Nor has the Italian Navy been used with that boldness which Signor Mussolini had announced<sup>1</sup> that it would display. Opportunities were not wanting for the Italians to vindicate their claims to dominate *mare nostrum*. The collapse of France robbed Great Britain of the collabora-

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Four.

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tion of the French fleet, upon which much faith had been pinned, and left the British Mediterranean Fleet distinctly inferior to that of Italy,<sup>1</sup> but nevertheless the faster Italian warships invariably withdrew whenever contact was established. British inferiority in strength was, however, redressed on the night of November 11th-12th when the main Italian fleet at Taranto was successfully attacked by the Fleet Air Arm. Signor Mussolini indignantly denied the accuracy of the announcement made in the House of Commons by Mr. Churchill, but as it was even he had to admit that three capital ships had been hit, though he declared that only one had been seriously damaged. Signor Mussolini, incidentally, did not enhance the reputation of his fleet for enterprise when he proceeded to twit the British Prime Minister with having said nothing about the recent torpedoeing of various units in the Central Mediterranean and in the port of Alexandria. Photographic reconnaissance established that one of the large new battleships of the Littorio class and two of the older, reconstructed battleships of the Cavour class had been damaged, and further reconnaissance showed that within a few days after this brilliant feat, which changed the balance of power, the three undamaged battleships, eight cruisers and nine destroyers had slipped out of Taranto and sought the protection of a safer harbour. An Italian force, comprising a ship of the Littorio class and at least one other battleship, which was encountered on November 27th, refused battle and hastily withdrew under smoke screens to Cagliari. On March 28th, 1941, however, the Italians did not succeed in escaping and were brought to action in the Battle of Cape Matapan. On the previous day our airmen on reconnaissance had sighted Italian warships steaming eastwards, and on the following morning two enemy squadrons, about one hundred miles apart, were located roughly to the west and south-west of Crete. The more southerly squadron included the *Vittorio Veneto*, of the Littorio class, while the other squadron included two battleships of the Cavour class. During the day the Littorio-class battleship was repeatedly attacked by our naval aircraft, and she was so damaged that her speed was reduced to 15 knots. The consequence of these attacks and of hits on other vessels was to enable Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, with his main battle fleet, to gain contact with the enemy, though it was only as darkness fell that close action was joined. The 8-inch gun cruisers *Pola*, *Zara* and *Fiume* were blown to pieces within a few minutes. Two destroyers certainly shared their fate, and other vessels may also have been destroyed. This great

<sup>1</sup> Chapters Four and Five.

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victory cost us two aircraft. Not a man nor a ship was lost. One striking lesson drawn from this engagement was the supreme value to a fleet of an efficient air arm. This was particularly true when the ships of one of the adversaries were so much faster than those of the other. The Italian vessels, designed to operate in the Mediterranean, were more lightly built and swifter than the corresponding units in our fleet and could only be overtaken by aircraft. Although, moreover, it was a favourite theme in Italy that battleships had been rendered largely obsolete by aircraft the Italian fleet entered the war without a single aircraft carrier. It was apparently considered by Signor Mussolini that, in the narrow waters of the Mediterranean, land-based aircraft would meet all Italy's requirements. This was by no means the view of all the naval experts, headed, it was believed, by Admiral Riccardi.

The drubbing administered to the Italian fleet off Cape Matapan made Signor Mussolini more averse than ever from risking a general engagement, and not even the prospect of losing the entire Axis army in Tunisia availed to entice out the Navy although he knew very well that, if his battle fleet did put to sea, it would at once have had that chance of meeting our ships for which it was allegedly yearning. In common fairness to the Italians, however, it has to be admitted that their lighter vessels often showed daring and enterprise. A special type of small torpedo-carrying craft, known as Italy's "secret weapon", made a bold attack upon Malta in July 1941, but every one of the attackers was destroyed by the defences. The same type of vessel was employed elsewhere, and the Italians persistently claimed that they had penetrated successfully into Alexandria harbour and sunk two of our warships. With the assistance of aircraft the Italian ships also inflicted considerable damage upon the escorted convoys which we sent from time to time to Malta. Upon at least two such occasions in 1942 Italian battleships set out to intercept the convoys, but they were invariably driven off. As it was two of these running engagements, fought in June and in August 1942, were expensive to us, and, known to the Italians as the battles of Pantelleria and Mezzagosto, were asserted to have been victories for them.<sup>1</sup> Referring to the former engagement the ebullient Signor Mussolini declared <sup>2</sup> that "Britain has at last felt deep in her flesh the bite of the Roman she-wolf", and that participants would in future years be able to say: "I took part in the

<sup>1</sup> Broadcast by Admiral Riccardi on Navy Day (June 10th) 1943.

<sup>2</sup> Speeches in Sardinia and on board a warship in June 1942.

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victorious battle of Pantelleria, and that battle is a turning point in the history of the war". Statistical accuracy is scarcely one of Italy's strong suits, especially in time of war, but it may be noted that in June 1943 an Italian Admiral claimed that up to May 31st submarines had destroyed enemy warships totalling 168,279 tons and merchant shipping totalling 1,236,616 tons, and, further, had damaged warships totalling 135,200 tons and merchant ships totalling 78,000 tons. These figures are, in any case, interesting because on June 13th Mr. Churchill sent a congratulatory message to Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham praising the work done by the Navy during the whole of the Tunisian campaign. Our submarines, said the Prime Minister, had sunk 47 ships and the surface forces 42 ships of an aggregate tonnage of 268,600. When to this was added the sinkings by air, a grand total of 137 ships and 433,400 tons was reached. During the long struggle on the mainland the Navy and Air Force working in cooperation sank 21 enemy destroyers or torpedo-boats and many small craft, and prevented 35% of the enemy supply ships and transports from reaching Tunisia. Mr. Churchill praised the mine-sweepers for having reopened the Mediterranean by clearing the channels, 600 miles long, between May 9th and 21st; mentioned that between November 8th, 1942 (when the Allies landed in French North Africa), and May 8th, 1943 (the day after the capture of Tunis and Bizerta), our losses were less than 2½% out of the whole vast mass of shipping, and, as a final figure, stated that the motor torpedo-boats had during the first fortnight in May sunk 9 ships for the loss of 4. All this, the Prime Minister's message concluded, "could not have been accomplished without the support of the battleships, aircraft carriers and cruisers who were denied the meeting with the Italian Battle Fleet they so ardently desire".<sup>1</sup>

Of the three fighting services the favourite with the Fascists had always been the Air Force. That this should have been so is easily understandable. The *Regia Aeronautica* or the *Ala Azzurra* was pre-eminently a Fascist creation. Signor Mussolini was himself a keen airman, and when, as he so often did, he went somewhere by air the Fascist Press always chronicled dutifully that the Duce was himself

<sup>1</sup> A leading article in *The Times* of April 1st, 1943, computed that, apart from submarines, the Italian fleet had lost since the beginning of the war 10 cruisers, 48 torpedo-boats and destroyers and some 35 smaller warships. It was reckoned that Admiral Riccardi then disposed of a surface fleet of 6 to 8 battleships, 2 heavy and 7 light cruisers, with nearly 60 destroyers and torpedo boats.

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piloting the machine and that such a perfect take-off and landing were never seen. This enthusiasm for flying, in fact, caused much apprehension in the bosoms of Signor Mussolini's most devoted admirers, and after one crash he was implored not to risk his precious life by undue foolhardiness. He complied for a while, but he was soon back again in the cockpit, if not always alone. He brought up his family to be "air-minded", and finally he lost his son Bruno who was killed early in the war while testing a machine. Another keen pilot was Count Ciano, Signor Mussolini's son-in-law and the former Minister for Foreign Affairs, who took part in the Abyssinian War and is reputed to have bombed Salonika during the inglorious campaign against Greece. Above all the Air Force was the darling of Italo Balbo; one of the *Quadrumviri* of the March on Rome and one of the few men who ventured to address Signor Mussolini by the familiar *tu* and, it was reported, to speak his mind to his chief. There are sharp differences of opinion as to the amount of good which he did during the years that he was Air Minister. His enemies and critics declared that he was too much of a showman, and that his flights over the Mediterranean and then to South and North America cost a prodigious quantity of public money and that the Air Force as a whole was unduly starved and neglected in order that he and his chosen companions might carry out their spectacular enterprises. This was certainly the case. But he did at least put Italian aviation "on the map" and was not unduly favoured when he was created an Air Marshal. But Marshal Balbo was become altogether too prominent a figure for Signor Mussolini's liking. He was shunted to Libya as Governor and Commander-in-Chief, and in the very first days of the war was shot down, deliberately as many people believed, by Italian guns over Tobruk. There was something engaging about Marshal Balbo's personality. He was a genial and utterly unscrupulous thug, whose pronounced lisp and almost school-girlishly pink-and-white complexion gave a false impression of his true character. The last time I spoke to him was at a reception in Cairo where he was on a visit to his friend the Italian Minister, Count Mazzolini. It was typical of him that he had landed on a military instead of a civilian aerodrome, and was profuse in apologies for his "error"; that he was only with difficulty restrained from deserting the reception and going with some charming ladies to the best-known Cairo cabaret, and that he made a number of indiscreet political statements to the representative of the local Italian newspaper. Marshal Balbo certainly had all the defects of his qualities. But at least he did have



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qualities, and that is more than can be said of all Signor Mussolini's more intimate collaborators.

In a speech to the Senatorial Committees for the Armed Forces and Finance made in May 1943 General Fougier, Under-Secretary of State for Air, claimed that in view of all the difficult circumstances and of the lavish equipment of the enemy the Italian Air Force could be proud of what it had achieved. Torpedo-bombers, fighters and bombers had been greatly developed, and fighters were still playing a predominant part. The contribution made by the *Regia Aeronautica* in the present war might be summarized in the following figures: Cargo-ships sunk, 145, totalling over 1,070,000 tons; warships sunk, 67, including 20 cruisers, 21 destroyers and 7 submarines; enemy planes destroyed, 2,242, including 1,944 shot down in combat; planes probably shot down, about 1,000. Air transport operations totalled 58,000, and 110,000 passengers and 42,000 tons of material were carried. The losses in three years' dogged fighting amounted to 12,500 men, including 2,000 officers. To these must be added 700 officers and about 3,000 N.C.O.s and specialists of other ranks killed or wounded in flying accidents during the feverish preparations made to replace losses suffered in combat and to ensure front-line efficiency. Even, however, if these figures be accepted, for the sake of argument, as accurate, it cannot be said that the I.A.F. has come up to all the expectations formed of it in this country. When, after the departure of Marshal Balbo, General Valle assumed responsibility for the *Ala Azzurra* he found that it was wanting in the basic elements of training. He at once started to train his men and to build up an industry for war, and was so far successful that by the end of 1936 the I.A.F. had, in the opinion of some competent observers, the best aircraft in the world. But the Abyssinian campaign had led the Italians to decide upon the discarding of the liquid-cooled engine. Henceforth all engines were to be air-cooled, and all available patents, British, American, German and even French, were acquired. This meant a delay. Italy began to fall behind. A further consequence was that Italy lost her own designers, many of whom went off to work in the U.S.A. Italy thus fell still further behind, and, though some of these designers were brought back, she has never picked up since. The accusation has often been made that the *Regia Aeronautica* was riddled with, and crippled by, graft and corruption, and even General Valle's good name has not been spared. Large contracts, it has been said and apparently with truth, were given to certain influential firms, which produced out-of-date machines.

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This was made evident when the Italian airmen were sacrificed to satisfy Signor Mussolini's ambition to take part in the Battle of Britain. The pilots themselves were said to have manœuvred their aeroplanes with considerable skill, but their machines were not equipped to meet the fire from the R.A.F. and went crashing down. The Italian pilots have themselves admitted that they were inadequately trained in navigation, and that they had been personally grounded for weeks on end because of the lack of training machines.

The best performances, by common consent, have been those of the pilots of the torpedo-bombers. It was these men who on several occasions took such a heavy toll of our convoys to Malta. Many of them were senior airmen and came from that 25% of first-class personnel referred to in a previous chapter.<sup>1</sup> The Germans attempted to teach the Italians the art of dive-bombing, but without much success. Their attacks were rarely pressed home in the face of stern opposition. On the other hand the Italian fighters, who had not particularly distinguished themselves, did put up a first-class show at the close of the Tunisian campaign after they had been left by the Germans. Altogether, therefore, there is little that we have had to learn from the I.A.F. The Italian experiences in Spain did, however, teach them two lessons, the value of which we too have come to appreciate. The first lesson was day bombers should be escorted, and for that reason the Italians tried, though without much success, to develop the long-range fighter. The second lesson was that the peace-time aerodrome with all its buildings and too closely packed aeroplanes was unsuitable to war, and that satellite grounds were indispensable.

The failure, on the whole, of the Italian bomber has, one suspects, much to do with the outcry raised in the Italian Press on the brutality of the British and American bombers. When the Italians were reminded that it was their General Douhet who for years had been lauded as the author of the doctrine of unlimited aerial warfare, the feeble reply was made that General Douhet's doctrine had remained on paper and in archives and had never actually been applied by Italy. This reply was thoroughly disingenuous. The doctrine had been approved by Signor Mussolini in 1938 when he told the Armed Forces that aerial warfare should be so waged as to destroy the enemy's supplies, dominate the sky and break the morale of the population. Again General Valle, writing in *Rassegna Italiana* <sup>2</sup> just before the war while

<sup>1</sup> Chapter Four.

<sup>2</sup> The issue for August-September 1939.

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he was still Under-Secretary for Air, declared that precedence should be given to the task of weakening the moral forces of resistance of the enemy population.

"The enemy", he wrote, "is to be considered beaten and conquered when he has exhausted all his moral values. And it is for this reason that the extension of the war so as to strike materially every point of the enemy's territory is justified by the fact that every action, even if directed against objectives not possessing a purely military character, helps to lessen the enemy's potentiality."

Moreover in the same article he added that "the action of bombing is not limited only to military objectives but extends to all fields of activity of the enemy nation, from the political to the commercial, from the land to the sea". As we have seen, it was no fault of Signor Mussolini's if this policy was not put into successful practice. Signor Mussolini's son Vittorio was able to record the "satisfaction" which he derived from dropping incendiary bombs upon the defenceless little Abyssinian huts. But the Italian pilots soon found out that the British Lion was a much uglier customer to tackle than the Lion of Judah. When, therefore, Italian propagandists such as Signor Salvatore Aponte smugly contrasted the chivalrous and honourable methods of the Italians with the barbarous behaviour of the enemy he was merely making a virtue of necessity.

From the Italian standpoint, in short, the war on land, sea and in the air ceased at a comparatively early stage to bear any close resemblance to what had been anticipated. Instead of being short and victorious, it dragged out its weary length in one calamity after another. True, Italy did tie down for many months large British, and, later, Allied forces in the Mediterranean. But her people were only too conscious that, if she had been left to stew in her own juice, she would not have held out for long, and that her continued resistance was due both to Signor Mussolini having sold the country, body and soul, to Herr Hitler and also to the realization of the Fascist clique that their only chance of survival depended upon a German victory. So true was the bitter jibe that, whereas in 1915 Italy had, with Signor Mussolini's backing, taken up arms in order to complete her national independence, in 1940 Signor Mussolini had driven his country into a hated war in order to make her the first of Germany's satellite States.

## Chapter Eight

### GERMANY'S ITALIAN HELOT

HERR MOLLIER, Press Attaché at the German Embassy in Rome, said to me during the last conversation we had together in August 1939, "We are the allies of Italy, you are her friends". These few words put the position in a nutshell. No one knew better than the Germans themselves that they were not popular in Italy. They had their Fascist partisans.<sup>1</sup> But the admiration felt by such Italians for the Nazis of Adolf Hitler was very different from the admiration bestowed in former times upon Goethe and Beethoven, upon Schiller and Wagner, even upon Bismarck and Mommsen. Education under Fascism was as distorted as everything else, and the feelings of Hitlerian Germany's Fascist admirers for her were a compound of gratification at the notion that the Nazi revolution and ideology followed so closely the Fascist model and of worship of Germany's ruthless efficiency and regained strength. Lofty and humane bonds of sympathy were completely wanting. Where the ties were not those of actually pecuniary interest, they were no less ties of a purely worldly character, the outcome of a half-baked and short-sighted notion that the future welfare of Italy was dependent upon that of Germany. It is not difficult to see how this conception arose. In 1915 the Entente Powers were able to buy the intervention of Italy because they were able to promise her territorial aggrandizement at the expense of Austria-Hungary and Turkey. The boot was now on the other leg. Germany was able to dangle before Italy's eyes the prospect of acquiring Tunisia, Corsica and the various other objects of her "natural aspirations", which were in the hands of Great Britain and France and which were not likely to be ceded in fee simple and so to qualify, as Italian possessions, for inclusion in the marble map of the modern Italian Empire flanking the *Via dell' Impero* in Rome.

The Italians were quick to realize that they had got a King Stork in the place of a King Log. "How much better off we were under Mussolini" was the typically Italian gibe, summarizing their disgust at the complete subservience of Signor Mussolini to Herr Hitler and their resentment at having been sold into Nazi bondage. That they would

<sup>1</sup> Chapter Four.

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be so treated should have been a foregone conclusion. During the existence of the Triple Alliance Italy had always been regarded by her allies as the poor country cousin, and in the bickerings between Rome and Vienna Berlin had generally inclined to the side of Vienna. Bismarck, if judged by the standard of morality of the two leaders of the Axis, was almost a model of probity, and yet even Fascist hacks have had to admit<sup>1</sup> that he "reacted brutally" to an Italian demand for his intervention with France, declaring in 1884 that "Italian interests in Morocco or in the Red Sea or in Tunisia or in Egypt or in any other part of the world are not in any way of present-day interest, but merely a question for the future". On August 26th, 1942, Signor Gayda enumerated at some length the aspirations which were then being cherished by Italy. His words ran textually as follows:

"Freedom of the Mediterranean must mean for Italy the assurance of her defence all round the long peninsula and the islands, in other words, the return to her sovereignty of the adjacent Italian territories which were formerly under her protection: Corsica, Dalmatia, Malta and the other islands which were Italian by tradition and looked to Italy for protection. Even the U.S.A., who in its Atlantic Charter does not contemplate the abandonment of the distant Panama Canal or of its Protectorate over the constellation of the neighbouring Republics which are considered indispensable for its defence, cannot but recognize that the Italian rights are well founded.

"Freedom of the Mediterranean means for Italy the dismantling of the barriers which bar the international Mediterranean highways to the ocean: Gibraltar and Suez.

"The living space required by Italy means for her, above all, the restitution of the whole of her East African Empire, suitably unified in one single political domain all along the coast and completed by the island zones that are needed to transform it into a more rational and complete economic, productive and commercial entity, more easily defended thanks to suitable strategic frontiers.

"Italy's living space must also mean for Italy the development and rounding-off of her possessions in North Africa, in which must again be incorporated the territories which once were under Turkish sovereignty and which Italy inherited as a result of the 1911-12 war, and which by fraudulent means England and France snatched from her on the coast and inland; it means also the addition of those other territories which are to be found among the historical aspirations and in the hearts of all Italians from the earliest days of united Italy;

<sup>1</sup> *L'Azione dell' Italia nei rapporti internazionali dal 1861 a oggi.* By Latinus.

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it means, finally, the incorporation of certain territories which from East Africa project themselves towards the Atlantic.

"Herein lies also the solution of Italy's vital problem of free access to the oceans. To the south of Libya is situated the extensive region of Lake Chad, which also belonged to Turkey as an integral part of the Libyan territory and for that reason belongs by right to Italy, but is now unlawfully occupied by France. From the Lake Chad region there stretches, in a south-westerly direction, another territory which extends to the ocean: Nigeria, a British colony.

"This aggregate of territories between Libya, that is to say the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic Ocean, must naturally be included in the economic and political sphere of influence of Italy's colonial system. The construction of a great Trans-Saharan railway line can unite and organize in one single economic and administrative entity these various regions and give Italy direct and independent access from her sea to the ocean.

"As a result of the above revision Italy will be able to make her valuable contribution to Europe's new productive civilization and to the rehabilitation of the old world without depriving any other nation of anything that is essential to it.

"The problem of raw materials is no less pressing. The problem of those raw materials which are not abundant in Italy can be solved by the possession of colonial territories which are not too poor in natural resources, and by international agreements governed by mutual respect for the boundaries of the living spaces and for their products. Italy needs a great and growing industry. With her dense population already overcrowding her territory, which is narrow and in places is barren owing to the wide mountainous zones, Italy cannot live solely by the proceeds of her national agriculture. These are the real reasons which threw us into the furnace of this great war."

If this article ever came under the eyes of Herr Hitler he took no notice of it. When the Axis troops were rushed into Tunisia in November 1942 it was the French flag that was flying over Tunis. Italian spokesmen from time to time declared that Germany recognized Italy's aspirations and that Italy's claims against France were maintained in their integrity. Not many people can have been taken in by such asseverations. Signor Mussolini was not allowed to make his triumphal entry into Tunis. It was, perhaps, as well for him that he did not, as things turned out.

Many Germans have persisted in holding that, whatever the legal rights of the case, Italy's denunciation of the Triple Alliance and her

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active adhesion to the Entente in 1915 was an act of treachery. Of this Italians were fully aware, and Italo-German relations have always been tinged by this memory. How often has one heard from Italian or German lips regrets that it had been necessary to conclude the Pact of Steel, and how much happier the speaker would have been if only his country had made an alliance with Great Britain. There was, in fact, only one condition upon which the Italo-German Alliance could possibly have functioned smoothly, and that condition was impossible. If Italy had been properly prepared for war, and if her forces had proved the military equals of the German, then Italy would have won the respect of her ally and would not have had to submit to all the overbearing arrogance to which she has been subjected. But Herr Hitler chose to plunge into a war for which he knew that Signor Mussolini was not militarily ready, and Italian militarism was soon seen to have been a figment of Signor Mussolini's imagination.

Italy's subservience to Germany began even before she entered the war. Politically it dated from that fatal day in March 1938 when Herr Hitler, taking his revenge upon that same Signor Mussolini who only a few years before had ostentatiously sent his troops to the Brenner and forbidden hands to be laid on Austria, marched into Vienna and arrested Chancellor Schuschnigg. Signor Mussolini's meek acceptance of this smack in the face stamped him for ever as the first of the Quislings. The second occasion upon which Signor Mussolini sold himself and his country to Herr Hitler was his rendering Italy entirely dependent upon Germany for her coal supplies.<sup>1</sup> After that Italy was, industrially, almost entirely at Germany's mercy. Before and during the first year of the war Germany exported to Italy more than she imported. Italy made payment for the difference by attracting German tourists. As a result of the blockade, however, Germany was cut off from her overseas markets and was compelled therefore considerably to increase her purchases—particularly of fruit, rice, olive oil and other foodstuffs—from Italy. This resulted in a complete change in the trade balance between the two countries, and almost for the first time in Italy's history her visible balance of trade with Germany became favourable. As a consequence of the large transfer of Italian labour to Germany this balance was still further augmented, so that the balance of payment became heavily in favour of Italy. In view of their clearing agreement, however, the upshot was that Italy accumulated large balances in RM. in Berlin which could not actually be transmitted to Italy and were

<sup>1</sup> March 13th, 1940.

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thus of very little value to her. As a matter of fact, since Italy had to pay out the workers' remittances to their families at home in lire and since she only received against such payments a credit book entry in R.M. in Berlin, she was forced to have recourse to the printing press, and this practice in turn contributed largely to the trend of the Italian currency towards inflation.

One of the first measures taken to promote closer and more fruitful cooperation was to increase the number of Italian workers in Germany. Before the Great War 1914-18 many thousands of Italians had gone every year to Germany, where they had been employed in building, coal-mining, road-making, agricultural labour and so forth. Even so the number of Italian workers in Germany was small in comparison with the half a million or so who, in the twenty years preceding the Great War, had poured forth annually into the vast territories of North and South America, Canada and elsewhere. In 1913 over 700,000 Italians emigrated abroad. After the Great War a great change came over the situation. Tariffs were set up on all sides, and a still harder blow was dealt to Italy by the restrictions imposed on immigration by the United States of America and portions of the British Empire. Signor Mussolini aggravated the position by discouraging and then prohibiting emigration as part of his imperialist policy under which Italian labour was henceforth not to be lost to Italy but to remain under the Italian flag. Signor Mussolini made matters still worse by encouraging the already strong procreative propensity of the nation, himself setting a lusty example and in this respect, so far at any rate as his legitimate offspring were concerned, winning the applause of the Roman Catholic Church. The reconquest of Libya, the seizure of Abyssinia and all the much-boasted schemes of Land Reclamation at home and overseas only touched the fringes of the problem how to find employment for the rising generation. An agreement made at the end of 1937 between Italy and Germany only affected a few tens of thousands. But with the outbreak of the present war more drastic steps were taken. On August 1st, 1942, Signor Lombrassa, at that time the Under-Secretary of State in charge of Migration and Colonization, spoke of Italy having placed 300,000 workers at the disposal of Germany's war industries. Italian men and women, he declared, were to be found in 2,000 places where work was being done, from Bavaria to East Prussia, from the borders of Denmark to Poland. Other estimates have put the number of these workers appreciably higher, though the Russian figure of one million is certainly exaggerated. Whatever, in



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any case, the correct figure may be, it has certainly been high enough to have had a sensible effect upon the Italian economy. There were soon frequent complaints that the country was suffering from a shortage of agricultural and of industrial workers, and the view was constantly expressed that Germany's insatiable demands for more and ever more labour were deliberately made with the object of destroying Italian industries, so that after the war the Germans would completely dominate a nation reduced to be mere hewers of wood and drawers of water.

A number of developments lent colour to this view. It will be enough for present purposes to allude in the first place to a survey of Italy's foreign trade made at the opening of 1942 by Senator Giannini.<sup>1</sup> He pointed out that the paralysis of overseas maritime traffic had practically reduced trade to that conducted with the European States alone. Trade with Germany headed the list and was based on the full cooperation between the two countries in the effort to win the war, and it had "an extension and a depth, the vastness of which will one day be made known". He added, significantly, that Italian trade with such countries as Belgium, Holland and Norway was "conducted through Germany". Two months later Senator Giannini was one of the signatories to the Italo-German economic and financial agreements for the current year. The principle whereby no delivery important for the war should be delayed or cancelled because the clearing account was for the moment not quite balanced was reaffirmed for 1942.<sup>2</sup> It was established that the volume of trade provided for under the agreement of February 26th, 1941, to the value of 1,000 million RM. on each side had been slightly exceeded by both. German deliveries had been a little the higher.<sup>3</sup> But whereas Italy had exported Mediterranean fruits, hemp, silk and artificial silk, zinc, mercury and foodstuffs, Germany had sent to Italy coal, iron, industrial goods, machinery, war material, chemical products and raw materials, dyes and pharmaceutical articles. A statement that the wages sent to Italy by the Italian workers in Germany totalled about one million RM. daily and played a considerable role in the clearing system was cancelled after having been issued to the German Press. This agreement was highly praised by Signor Riccardi, Minister of Foreign Exchanges and Currency, who pointed out that the negotiations had covered not only the exchange of goods but also communications, industrial collaboration in the widest sense, military

<sup>1</sup> In the *Corriere della Sera*, January 2nd, 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *Deutsches Nachrichten-Büro* of March 14th, 1942.

<sup>3</sup> 10 to 15%.

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assistance from the financial, industrial and transport standpoints, and man-power. He professed to be "pricking certain bubbles of ignorance and bad faith" when he declared that Italy could supply Germany with industrial, textile and chemical raw materials indispensable for the prosecution of the war; and, while he insisted that the negotiations had not been conducted in any haggling spirit, he was careful to state that Italy's contribution to Germany was "determined by the complete satisfaction of her direct requirements and the demands of her export trade with other countries".<sup>1</sup>

Elsewhere there was less optimism. Signor Renato Ricci, then Minister of Corporations, complained that essential national work connected with the mineral resources of the country was being hampered by lack of labour. The Secretary of the Federation of Agricultural Labourers spoke of the shortage of skilled and agricultural labour. The annual report of the *Società Edison* stated that plants under construction had not begun to work owing to the difficulty in obtaining machinery, materials and labour. Much unrest was caused by the knowledge that discussions were proceeding whether Germany should export more raw materials to Italy or Italy send more workers into the German factories. The Germans could adduce several powerful arguments in favour of the latter course. The more skilled workers they could import from abroad the more Germans became available for military service. The supply of raw materials and particularly of coal imposed an increasingly heavy strain upon the deteriorating German transport system, and the industrial equipment of Italy was in any case not so good as that of Germany. Costs would be kept noticeably lower if industry were more concentrated and rationalized. These arguments were not pleasing to the Italians. Signor Riccardi boldly gave a lecture in Munich <sup>2</sup> in which he pointed out that Italy was a country with a mixed economic system, that the land now under cultivation was no longer sufficient, that Italy must develop and strengthen her industries; and that conditions in Italy did not yet allow the problem of concentration of industry to be faced in its entirety. These views were promptly backed in the Italian Press, which said there were as many good reasons against as for the concentration of industry, and that account must be taken of "the individual nature of Italian life in its present conditions and in its future aspirations".<sup>3</sup> It was maintained that Italy did not dispose of such superabundant

<sup>1</sup> Article in the *Sole* of March 17th, 1942.

<sup>2</sup> July 10th, 1942.

<sup>3</sup> *Giornale d' Italia*, July 12th, 1942.

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industrial plant that she could think of a surgical amputation which would lead to the closing of many factories and the dismissal of tens of thousands of workers. The statement that such a reduction would be only temporary was challenged. Technical experience, it was urged, taught that a process involving the reduction, or rather the demobilization of industry would inevitably be permanent. Once factory workers were scattered and lost they could not be reassembled, and therefore the closing of a factory meant the irreparable loss of a whole body of those precious and irreplaceable skilled labourers who had created its activity. Italy must think not only of the present but also of the future. She must think also of peace and of the immediate national and international tasks which peace would impose on her if she was to reap from her sacrifices and victory the benefits to which she was entitled. It is evident that Signor Gayda was hauled over the coals for having taken this line, because a fortnight later he wrote another article largely recanting what he had said and urging industrialists who "may be, for a brief time, to some extent sacrificed" not to "abandon themselves to useless grumbling or undue depression". Other writers, however, showed greater strength of character and conviction. The well-known economic writer, Signor Paccas, published in the *Critica Fascista*<sup>1</sup> an article in which he arrived at the conclusion that a concentration governed by the special needs of war would result in a decrease of the degree of economic self-sufficiency of a given branch of industry, and he argued that

"a country which has spent milliards and its best energies to industrialize regions which previously had been left in a backward state of economic development, cannot lightly compromise such a policy when it is ascertained—by way of hypothesis—that such 'concentration' would lead to the abandonment of the initiatives created with so much effort, and from which economic and social results of no small importance were expected."

The force of this reasoning can be measured when it is remembered how vital a factor in Italian life the individual craftsman and "small man" are. A large proportion of small factories are situated in inaccessible places. Of the factories 71% had in 1938 less than 11 employees, while 20.1% employed between 11 and 50 workers. Of the total number of factories, including small and medium-sized factories, 98.6% employed less than 250 hands and only 0.2% employed

<sup>1</sup> September 1st, 1942.

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over 1,000 workmen. In the light of these statistics it can be easily understood how widely would be felt the presence in Germany in August 1942 of 170,000 skilled workers alone. Small wonder if the Italians jibbed at the economic structure of their country being metamorphosed in the immediate and future interests of a detested ally.

One grievance which weighed heavily with so essentially artistic a nation as the Italian was the acquisition by Germans of large quantities of pictures, antiques and articles of virtu in general. So much indignation was caused by the frequent reports that Italy was being stripped of her treasures that Signor Bottai, at that time Minister of Education, found it necessary to make a public statement denying the rumours of the exportation in mass of works of art to Germany and declaring that such articles could not be exported without the permission of the Government. He declared that his Ministry had suspended all permits granted to public bodies to negotiate for the transfer of works of art in their possession, and he emphatically denied that works of art of great value had been secretly sent abroad and that even objects in State museums had been exported to Germany. The truth was that owing to the breakdown in war of communications with foreign countries Germany had supplanted the U.S.A. as the principal importer of works of art from Italy. Signor Bottai, however, lifted a corner of the veil when, after reading out a list of the objects which, it had been decided, might be exported to Germany, he added that, even if the Italians had been sorry to surrender some of them, no one of them was so valuable as to preclude its export. He wound up a lame explanation by saying that the decree forbidding the export in war-time of works of art had not been framed to meet the increased demands of the German market but to prevent the exchange of articles having a secure value, such as works of art, against objects with a fluctuating value, such as money. A different light was thrown upon the Italian version of Signor Bottai's statement by the Rome correspondent of the *Transocean* newsagency, who reported<sup>1</sup> him as declaring that the few works of art which had been exported were objects which had been only temporarily in Italy and therefore did not rank among Italy's art treasures. A message to the *Deutsches Nachrichten-Büro* took the matter even further when it enumerated amongst the most valuable articles exported paintings by Tintoretto, Leonardo da Vinci, Rubens and Memling, and, above all, the altar-piece by Multscher in the Cathedral at Vipiteno (Sterzing). Inasmuch as only a few months earlier the *Tempo*, an Italian illustrated

<sup>1</sup> May 8th, 1942.

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journal, had printed a photograph of Marshal Goering gazing with admiration at this altar-piece, the obvious deduction was that he had added this masterpiece either to a national or, more probably, his own private collection.

Another striking example of Italy's miserable subservience to Germany has been furnished by her anti-Semitic policy. The whole conception of Racialism was totally alien to the Italian and, what was very important, to the Roman Catholic tradition. I well remember the roars of good-humoured laughter which greeted a suggestion by Signor Mussolini that the raped Sabine women had probably found Jews in the *borghetto* to supply them with all requisite clothing. A much more daring sally was his statement that Christianity was a Jewish sect, and that if it had remained confined to Palestine instead of coming to Rome it would probably have shared the fate of the Essenes and other forgotten sects. This remark was made in his long speech commending the Lateran Treaties to the Chamber in 1929 and provoked murmurs of dissent and gasps of astonishment. Not unnaturally it also drew at once a vigorous protest from Pius XI. But there was nothing in Signor Mussolini's statement or in the Pope's rejoinder that showed any anti-Semitic animosity. The Vatican, obviously, cannot tolerate any doctrine of "race". Such a doctrine is fundamentally incompatible with the quintessence of a Church that claims to be universal. The racial idea was no less strange to the Italian mentality, and, what probably counted with such a realist as Signor Mussolini, there was not, and never had been for several centuries, any Jewish problem in Italy. Signor Mussolini had himself written on the folly of anti-Semitism, and had acknowledged that the relatively few tens of thousands of Jews living in Italy had become thoroughly Italianized and good nationalists. Many Jews had, in fact, served the country well. Baron Sonnino, Signor Nathan, Admiral Ascoli and General Ottolenghi were all men who rose to eminence. There was, therefore, a general feeling of astonishment, dismay and discontent when in the autumn of 1938 decrees first appeared ordering the expulsion of foreign Jews and the persecution of Italian Jews. It may be admitted that these decrees were not, at least until Fascism was drawing to its close, very strenuously enforced. Fundamentally, lamented a German journalist,<sup>1</sup> an anti-Jewish tendency does not prevail in Italy, as has already been shown by exemptions in the racial law for Jews of Italian citizenship or

<sup>1</sup> Maximilian Pauly, a Rome correspondent of the *Transocean* newsagency, in June 1943.

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for such as have made sacrifices for Fascism, or are members of the Fiume Legion, or became members of the Fascist Party before 1922, or are Jewish front soldiers. But, he went on to say with evident relish, all Jews are forbidden to hold posts as teachers. Jews who cannot claim to have done anything for Italy or Fascism (the alternative is interesting) are not allowed to join the Party or the Armed Forces, or to occupy public offices, or to enter their names on professional lists. And as the war went on anti-Jewish restrictions became more severe. Compulsory public work was ordered for Jews. Jews were forbidden to become subscribers to the telephone service or to possess radio sets. Jews were eliminated from trading in foodstuffs, then from general trading in rationed articles. From time to time the more rabid Jew-baiters such as Signor Farinacci wrote frenzied denunciations of the ease with which Jews could buy themselves new names, "Aryan certificates", and Italian citizenship. This was, perhaps, one of the less reprehensible forms of bribery and corruption.

Religion, however, was one field where Signor Mussolini was powerless to yoke his people to the Nazi chariot. Largely owing to the preachings of Pius XI, who never forgot the critical years which he had spent in Warsaw, the Roman Catholics of Italy had been groomed to see in Bolshevism their arch-enemy, and in this teaching the Church found a stout ally in Fascism, which came to rest one of its main justifications for having usurped power in 1922 upon its having saved the country from the deadly virus of Bolshevism. This, as a matter of fact, was sheer rubbish, as Signor Mussolini himself had admitted.<sup>1</sup> It was, therefore, with profound astonishment and bewilderment that the Italian people had suddenly learned of the signature of the Russo-German Pact in August 1939. The event had, as we have already seen, taken Count Ciano and the Italian Government almost equally by surprise. The Fascist regime had, therefore, had no opportunity of preparing public opinion to meet the shock, and the astonished nation had rubbed its eyes and wondered how such a thing was possible. Had not Herr Hitler been Signor Mussolini's confederate in backing General Franco against the legitimate Spanish Government out of fear lest Spain should become Bolshevik? Had not Herr Hitler in September 1936 exploded at Nürnberg in a violent tirade against Bolshevism and flatly refused that measure of collaboration with Soviet Russia which Signor Mussolini was ready to accept, because he was then toying with the notion of a comprehensive peace being established in Europe, and to

<sup>1</sup> See article in *The Nineteenth Century and After* of June 1943.

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that end was prepared to hold that, so long as Communism remained at home, Italy was not concerned with the particular form of Government by which Russia was ruled? Had not the anti-Comintern Pact originated in Berlin and Tokyo? What insincere humbug and hypocrisy, then, were now seen to have been behind all the highfalutin twaddle about ideologies and the defence of European civilization, under the cloak of which Italy and Germany had been testing their armaments and their latest military theories in Spain. This agreement between Germany and Russia made the Italians, and especially the more religiously-minded among them, more than ever suspicious of Nazism and revived all their qualms over too close an association with a regime so deeply tinged with Atheism, the cult of Wotan, Racialism and other anti-Christian beliefs.

In war the religious outlook is, as a rule, strongly affected in two ways. Either faith is submerged under a surge of hedonism and fatalism, and *Carpe diem* becomes the motto, or else there is a perceptible quickening of moral and religious fervour. As the war dragged on, such quickening as there was in Italy was stimulated by the hope and conviction that somehow or other the Pope would succeed in bringing about peace and ridding the country of the now hated and discredited Fascist regime. Moreover, as the airmen of the United Nations increased the frequency and the weight of their bombardments and yet Rome remained unscathed, more and more gratitude came to be felt to the Pope for having "spread a holy umbrella", as the phrase ran, over the capital into which had poured thousands of refugees from devastated areas. Thus the power and prestige of the Pope were strengthened, especially locally, and his utterances were scanned with a minute attention accorded to those of no other public man. Allegiance to the Pope superseded in many Roman breasts the allegiance formerly professed to the Fascist regime. How far this additional prestige of the Pope, born largely of popular gratitude for physical security, will survive the bombing of Rome it is too soon properly to estimate. The Pope himself was quick to admit in his letter<sup>1</sup> to Cardinal Marchetti-Selvaggiani that the attack upon Rome had been a blow to "the authority We enjoy" and a rejection of "all Our *démarches*" pleading that "Our much-beloved Rome" be spared the horrors and devastation of aerial bombing. A very striking illustration of the apprehensions entertained in Italy about the anti-Christian philosophy of Germany was seen in a long article contributed by Francesco

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Ten.

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Orestano, an Italian Academician, to *Gerarchia*,<sup>1</sup> the monthly review founded by Signor Mussolini. Writing on the theme "Religious Life in the New Europe", Signor Orestano said that the problem of the religious life of the peoples of Europe would be one of the most immediate after the war, and if there had arisen organically within the Nazi movement authoritative currents of thought and programmes which were definitely irreligious and anti-Christian these manifestations should be taken seriously. Signor Orestano traced this spiritual attitude, "which is fairly widespread in the Germany of to-day", back to Hegel, and said that "no other European philosophy, excepting Bolshevism, has reached conclusions more radically anti-Christian and atheist". He conceded that the religious future of Germany was the affair of the German people. But the religious future of Europe was a matter for Europe, and "any attitude on the part of any responsible Power which might at the start be giving rise to the slightest doubt as to the compatibility of the New Order with the respect necessary for the spiritual and religious liberty of each and all would be a fatal political error". He further declared that "History demands a miracle of Germany: not only to win the war, but to conquer herself, overcome herself: to confirm the rule that the strongest are those who are most just, the most upright, the most humane". This article, as can be imagined, attracted great attention, and replies to it appeared in the Italian and Swiss Press. What did come out very clearly from the whole discussion was that there are various ideological and cultural differences between Italy and Germany which it is vain to hope to bridge.

It is not possible to estimate with equal sureness the degree to which the Gestapo infiltrated into Italy, exactly how many and which key positions in the Italian administrative and industrial machine were occupied by Germans, and how far the direction of Italy's armed forces was under German control. Direct and visible proof was obtained that the Italian mails were subjected to German censorship, and repatriated countrymen of ours attributed to the Gestapo the increased severity of the punishments inflicted upon listeners to foreign broadcasts. The stranglehold of Germany was the main reason invariably adduced for the impossibility of any popular revolt against the Fascist regime before Germany had undergone crushing military defeats in the field and until the United Nations had made a successful landing in force upon Italian metropolitan territory. The boastful report sent by

<sup>1</sup> Issue of December 1942.



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Marshal Messe upon the action of his army in disputing with our Eighth Army the possession of the Mareth Line was principally interesting in that it represented his chafing under the orders of the German High Command in Tunisia, and thus showed how ill some Italian Generals could stomach their plans being overridden by their allies. This episode explained, therefore, the long-drawn-out polemics between the Italian and German Press and Radios as to the seniority of Marshals Rommel and Bastico in Libya. The Germans, though they could not conceal their contempt for their allies, did make efforts not to wound Italian susceptibilities unduly, and in Rome and other large cities their officers and officials were frequently dressed in mufti. But the German domination of Italy was nevertheless, and was felt to be, a dread reality. It is generally agreed that this octopus-like stranglehold really dated from the grim months of the winter 1940-41 when the Italian arms were everywhere meeting with reverse after reverse. The anxious attention of the Italians was then focussed almost exclusively upon the war and few people realized what was afoot. When the military situation had grown less tense the Italians discovered that their country had been unostentatiously but thoroughly occupied by the Germans, who had put political advisers, a political police, economic coordinators and specialists of many kinds into key positions of control from which it was they who, even if Italians remained the titular heads of the bodies concerned, really directed the administrative and to a lesser degree, perhaps, the military machine. From the Hotel de Russie, the headquarters in Rome of the German High Command; from the Villa Wolkonski, the German Embassy; and, later, from Field-Marshal Kesselring's headquarters out at Frascati issued the orders and "advice" in accordance with which all the most important actions were taken. An American colleague who remained on in Rome after me told me later that when Italians hailed a taxicab at night with the words, "*Libero? Libero?*" ("Are you free?"), the answer would often come out of the darkness, "*No, Italiano*" ("No, I'm Italian"). I have often wondered why the old popular practice of affixing pasquinades to a statue in Rome should have died out. The spirit has survived. Without it the Italians would long ago have been completely sunk.

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VERY few months after the declaration of war, serious cracks began to appear in the jerry-built Fascist structure. When in the preceding year Germany had attacked Poland and had consequently become involved in hostilities with Great Britain and France, there had been no popular clamour in Italy for immediate armed intervention on the side of the German ally. Exactly the contrary. The proclamation of Italian non-belligerency had been received with almost universal joy and relief, and with a fervent wish that Signor Mussolini would somehow or other contrive to pull some chestnuts out of the fire without getting Italian fingers burned in the process. Such successes as the Allies had—the *Altmark* exploit was a conspicuous case in point—were welcomed with much popular satisfaction that was even betrayed in the newspapers. A German war film which was intended to impress the Italians with admiration for German military efficiency produced upon the selected guests in Rome anything but the desired effect and filled them rather with a greater aversion from war than they already had. These sentiments persisted even after Italy's entry into the war. The brief campaign against an already tottering France was too short to arouse much bad blood. The early successes in British Somaliland lent themselves as little to the exploitation of a violent campaign of hatred against ourselves. A few weeks more fighting by the Germans, it was joyfully anticipated, would do the trick. Great Britain would be forced to surrender, give up some of her colonies and be ejected from the Mediterranean for ever. Medals would be distributed all round with a lavish hand. *Evviva il Duce!* The winter of 1940-41 brought a rude awakening from this happy dream. Instead of surrendering Great Britain inflicted a catastrophic defeat upon Marshal Graziani, put three Italian battleships out of action in Taranto harbour, and exacted a devastating toll from the combined forces of the *Luftwaffe* and the *Regia Aeronautica* in the Battle of Britain. More humiliating and ignominious still, the "contemptible little army" of Greece chased the Italian invaders back into Albania with heavy losses. The storm of disasters which thus burst upon Italy within a few months dealt a blow to Fascist arrogance and to the national morale from which

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the country never completely recovered. As was only to be anticipated, Italian morale proved to be a very variable factor. It sank more easily and more quickly than the morale of Great Britain or of Germany, but it showed great resilience. At times it even remained unexpectedly buoyant. During the last few desperate days of the Tunisian campaign the Italian forces on land and in the air put up a conspicuously better fight than did the Germans. It was an opportunity to make a *bella figura*, and the Italians seized it with acknowledged gallantry.

But by general consent the war was unpopular. As early as November 1940 Signor Mussolini was trying to explain that "at the outbreak of war a certain slowing-down of Party activity was a consequence of the objective fact [this was a highly inaccurate statement] that all Party officials had to leave". Since, however, as he went on to say, Italy had plenty of men, the Party must in these circumstances resume its functions with an unchanged and increasing vigour, pursuing energetically the battle on the Home Front in the political, economic, intellectual and spiritual spheres. The Party ought to win freedom for itself and the whole nation from the remnants of the secret societies forming part of the *petit bourgeois* ballast. It had to preserve and stress the atmosphere of a great epoch before the hard times came, establishing closer and better contact with the people than ever before, assuring their health and moral welfare. A certain pacifism, intellectual and international, was being closely watched and fought. In other words, the war was barely five months old and Italy was only at the beginning of her defeats before Signor Mussolini had to admit publicly that, in spite of years of intensive propaganda, the intellectual and lower middle classes were opposed to the war; that the position of Fascism required to be bolstered up by the castor-oil and bludgeon methods of its early days; that wasteful private expenditure must be checked by recourse to sumptuary restrictions of all kinds; that, although there had been many smug assurances that Italy even at war was better off than many other countries at peace, the industrial and economic life of the nation must be governed by a long series of measures of detailed and intricate control, and that feelings of patriotic and civic duty must be inculcated by further doses of Jingoism. As soon as Signor Mussolini had given the signal a torrent of abuse was let loose upon the "professional alarmists, the convinced pessimists, the empty brains and the sour stomachs", and it was urged that "those Italians who hold aloof, those idiots, coffee-house strategists, rumour-mongers and disseminators of foreign wire-

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less broadcasts should be handed over to the Old Guard of trustworthy Fascists for particular attention". The surrender of Bardia on January 5th, 1941, was the occasion of the famous "Woe! Woe!" broadcast in which Signor Ansaldo threw such a lurid light upon the prevailing apathy and defeatism.

"Woe to all those in their twenties," he said, "who in their usual café, or their usual haunt, have not felt a burning desire to be over there with the defenders of Port Bardia. . . . Woe to those in their forties who . . . have not felt, even for a second, a virile regret that they can no longer carry a rifle as in the spring of their youth. Woe to those who on hearing the *communiqués* of these last few days have not felt their hearts suffocate with anxiety and curiosity while they were passing their time at some football match or some more or less stupid film. . . . They delude themselves if they think that they can go on living like this, remote from any discomfort while others are fighting a war to which they do not even give a thought."

Signor Ansaldo always had a faculty, amounting almost to a genius, for letting the cat out of the bag, and this famous lamentation on the apathy, indifference, war-weariness and even hostility of the Italian public was of inestimable value to enemy observers and provided a clue to the mass of appeals, warnings, threats, eulogies and blandishments which continued to be hurled at the nation according to the circumstances.

One of the favourite themes of the Italian fuglemen was the abysmal stupidity and ignorance displayed by those enemy spokesmen who made a distinction between the Fascist regime and its active supporters and the Italian nation as a whole. All such insulting attempts to drive a wedge between the Italian people and their Government, it was shrilly proclaimed, were doomed to failure. The whole nation was a compact unit, strong as granite. But the absurdity of this theme was enhanced by the admissions of the Italians themselves. In commenting upon various examples of sins of omission and commission perpetrated towards the end of June 1943, at a moment, that is to say, when Italy was confessedly in mortal peril, the *Stampa* of Turin<sup>1</sup> stated:

"Leaving aside those—and there are many of them—who deal in the black market, or who commit other dishonourable acts, the Fascists whose cards of membership are withdrawn either because they help British prisoners or because they no longer want to 'wear the badge', or for insufficient 'sentiments of Italianity' or 'for lack

<sup>1</sup> Issue of June 22nd, 1943.

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of discipline' are no longer a number but have become a legion. Somebody who is likely to know said to us: 'You see, to be a member of the Party is perhaps more dangerous than to be outside it. One no longer knows what attitude to adopt. Everywhere there is suspicion and distrust. You have only to forget your badge to be taken for a defeatist; nobody is trusted but the Old Guard. The young ones are in a constant state of fear. As there is no castor-oil available, the days of the bludgeon are already approaching. In fact it is rumoured that it is already at work!'"

Nor was it only in the Press comments that the deficiencies of the Fascist regime were brought into the light. The principal evidence of the shortcomings of the Fascist Party came from within that body. At the outbreak of the war in 1939 the Secretary of the Fascist Party was still Signor Starace. But his long tenure of that office soon afterwards came to an end. In the comprehensive reshuffle of the Cabinet<sup>1</sup> made by Signor Mussolini at the close of the following October Signor Starace was displaced in favour of Signor Muti, a young and gallant enough swashbuckler who was a personal crony of Count Ciano and who was said to have distinguished himself as an airman in Abyssinia and in Spain. He did not last long. He did, however, or it would perhaps be more accurate to say he should have done, the Allies one good service. In mid-January 1940 he published a long account of an address which he had delivered to a number of the Party bosses and in which he made it quite clear that Italy was determined to pursue her own interests and had no friendly feelings for the Democracies. Signor Muti in any case was soon found wanting and made way for Signor Serena. His reign was also brief, and he was supplanted by the youthful Signor Vidussoni, of whom *mauvaises langues* said that he owed his promotion to his having accommodately married the sister of Signor Mussolini's mistress of the moment. A less scandalous interpretation was that this young man of 26 was expected to exert some much-needed influence upon the recalcitrant student class, many members of which were showing a lamentable lack of enthusiasm for the regime and were even going so far as to inquire what had become of all the earlier fine talk about *Giovinezza* and the place that Youth ought to have in the councils of the nation. It can be imagined how bitterly disliked these views were by all those ageing Fascists who were clinging with all the desperate tenacity of a stage beauty to the last relics of their youth, virility and vitality, and who, having borne the burden

<sup>1</sup> Secretaryship of the Fascist Party carried with it Ministerial rank.

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of the fray, were in no mood to surrender posts of profit and prestige and to make way for unfledged upstarts. This rapid succession of changes in the Party Secretaryship was, then, proof enough in itself that the spirit informing the Fascist organization was anything but satisfactory.

How serious the position was was soon revealed. The clearest and most comprehensive picture of the dry rot that was sapping the vitality of the Party was painted in a resolution passed by the National Directorate on May 26th, 1942, at a meeting held under the presidency of Signor Mussolini. The National Directorate was a body which ranked in importance after the Chamber of Deputies and the Fascist Grand Council. Its membership was restricted, and it was mainly charged with the duty of controlling the domestic policy and efficient working of the Party. The resolution ran:

"In its first meetings after reports received from all the Federal Secretaries, the National Directorate of the Fascist Party reaffirms that the fundamental task of the Party, in accordance with the statute approved by the Grand Council at its meeting of March 11th, 1938, is the defence and development of the Fascist Revolution and the political organization and education of the Italian people on the basis of the main points of Fascist doctrine, which demand a different and higher political, moral and social way of life in peace and, especially, in war. Fascists, who have the privilege of being the artificers and harbingers of the revolutionary truths of Fascism, must show by their example that they have the right and hence the duty to fulfil this task. All the Institutions created by the regime in every sphere must serve as instruments for the progressive and complete political education of the Italian people. To this end the National Directorate has decided to urge individual Federations to make a rigorous selection among their members so that they can banish all those who, for any reason whatever, no longer deserve the honour of fighting under the banners of the Littorio which have been consecrated by the sacrifice and blood of thousands of comrades.

"The Directorate reaffirms that the G.I.L. (Gioventù Italiana del Littorio), created by the Duce, is the main instrument for the education of the Italian people and must receive the utmost attention of the Party. Here also the quantitative must give way to the qualitative principle. In the young comrades serving with the Forces, students, peasants and workers, the Party salutes the heroic symbol of youth of the Fascist era and exalts the resistance of the young Fascists at Bir-el-Gobi as the consecration and expression of what can be achieved by faith in Fascism. The Directorate is convinced that all

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young men worthy of this name will maintain and defend the values created by the Black Shirt Revolution with the blood of squadristism and the achievements of the regime. These values are: absolute devotion to the Fatherland and pride in our race and history; conscious discipline; the most serious attention in every type of activity; love of combat and familiarity with danger; courage and the obligation of truth; disinterestedness in positions of command; division between the sacred and the profane; absolute loyalty in personal relationships.

"By order of the Duce, the Directorate decrees that all those Fascists who hold positions of authority or of public or political importance can neither maintain nor accept, without the permission of the Party, administrative posts, temporary or permanent, normal or exceptional, to which they would be entitled by reason of their position. The posts concerned are those connected with the administration, representation and control of all types of public bodies, of private firms and undertakings, civilian and commercial societies of every kind, trusts, syndicates and every other type of economic and technical organization, however they are called. This ruling applies even in cases where the organization in question is irregularly formed and functions only *de facto*. The present regulations concerning incompatibility and authorization remain unchanged, but the Secretary of the Party, in agreement with the Ministers for the Interior, Justice, Finance and Corporations, will decide which positions or posts of public or political importance require Party permission for the assumption of the administrative posts cited above.

"The Directorate has decided that, for the scholastic year 1942-43, the G.I.L. shall organize the scholastic syllabus for all urban elementary schools."

This resolution produced a flood of heterogeneous comment in the Italian Press and from the Rome correspondents of neutral newspapers. Signor Gayda put his finger on the sore spot when he wrote that Corporativism had naturally created an intimate contact, almost a fusion, between economic and political life. But, he said, it was inadmissible that the personal, economic or financial interests of men in high positions should take precedence over their political activity. It was a moral problem. It was easy to drain marshes, to build roads and to change the external form of the country, but it was difficult to create a new spirit of discipline and a new mentality. This was plain speaking with a vengeance! Other commentators discussed the vexed problem whether the Fascist Party ought to be a political oligarchy or

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a mass party. They all agreed that for many years past the Party had been hampered by the inclusion of many opportunists who had exploited their membership to avoid military service by invoking their function in the Party and who owed their cards of membership to wire-pulling and graft. The purge of the Party was soon begun. In August Signor Vidussoni reported to Signor Mussolini at another meeting of the National Directorate that the process of weeding out unworthy Fascists was proceeding resolutely but with "scrupulous objectivity", though he had to confess that it was meeting with some resistance "in those sectors which are subject to the discrimination between the sacred and the profane, between activity carried on for the higher ends of the interests of the cause and activity directed towards selfish aims". However, he added with grim complacency, many persons affected by the Directorate's ruling on administrative posts had resigned from such positions, while there was "a considerable falling off in the number of people applying for new administrative appointments". Thus the new regulations had hit their target and were achieving their end. The institution of this Party purge was generally very popular. It not only pleased such Fascists who were genuinely sincere and upright, but it also delighted the much larger body of people who looked forward to enjoying a number of juicy scandals and who barely concealed their hope that when once the smaller rafters had been set on fire the conflagration would spread and would end by enveloping and destroying the whole Fascist structure. The knowledge that many persons were licking their chops in gleeful anticipation of this development frightened those charged with carrying out the purge. A reaction set in. It was conveniently discovered that there had been too much interested exaggeration in the whole affair, and that the "substantial uprightness" of the Party leaders had clearly emerged from the investigations,<sup>1</sup> so that the awaited scandals had vanished into thin air. This judgement was premature. The catharsis was not yet finished. The imminent catastrophe overhanging Italy owing to the disasters crowding fast upon the Axis forces in North Africa put an end to Signor Vidussoni's career. He was swept away in his turn and replaced by Signor Scorza,<sup>2</sup> that Yahoo of the Fascist Old Guard, who had achieved a certain notoriety in the past and had for many years been living in comparative obscurity.

Signor Scorza's restoration to favour came soon after a drastic

<sup>1</sup> "As was foreseeable", added the *Critica Fascista* of April 1st, 1943, with, presumably, unconscious irony.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Six.



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reconstruction of the Cabinet, announced on February 5th, 1943. Count Ciano was removed from the Palazzo Chigi and appointed Ambassador to the Holy See. Signor Mussolini himself became Foreign Minister once again and named as Under-Secretary Signor Bastianini who had already had experience of that office under Count Ciano and who had succeeded Count Grandi as Italian Ambassador in London in 1939-40. Count Grandi lost his post at the Ministry of Justice, but he remained as President of the Chamber and soon afterwards was honoured by receiving the Collar of the Annunziata and thus becoming technically the King's cousin. Of the other "resigning" Ministers the only one of any interest was Signor Bottai,<sup>1</sup> the Minister of Education. At first it was reported that he was to become editor of the *Tribuna*, but for some reason the appointment was not made and up to the fall of Fascism he had not been compensated by the bestowal of another post. His review, the *Critica Fascista*, had probably been living too much up to its title. This Cabinet reshuffle, coming as it did immediately after the dismissal of Marshal Cavallero, Chief of the General Staff, and his replacement by General Ambrosio, created a profound impression. The Italian Press, of course, dismissed the whole affair as just one of those periodical "changes of the guard" with which the country had grown familiar. A change of Ministers, it was once again explained, was as natural and scientific as the rotation of crops: an explanation which entirely failed to account for the political soil round Signor Mussolini's roots never becoming sour or exhausted. Signor Gayda even maintained that the changes had not been determined by the circumstances of the war, and that the very fact of such changes being made in a regular and peaceable manner in time of war only proved the continuity of Fascist policy. To think otherwise was to display an abysmal ignorance of Fascist Italy typical of the Democracies. This woeful failure to understand Italy was not, as it happens, the monopoly of the democratic countries. The Rome Correspondent of the *Transocean* agency went out of his way to state categorically that the general upheaval was "evidently more than a mere change of the guard", and "total war" was the principal theme in the next issue of the usually inspired *Relazioni Internazionali* of Milan. Nobody in fact really supposed for a single instant that such a drastic reconstruction of the Cabinet, accompanied by many changes among the Under-Secretaries and leading Prefects and by the nomination of 34 new Senators, was just a matter of normal routine, and indeed to suppose

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Six.

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such a thing at that moment was to pay but a poor compliment to Signor Mussolini's sanity. The neutral Press, especially that of Switzerland, indulged in much reasonable speculation. It was believed that Count Ciano, Count Grandi and Signor Bottai had manifested dissatisfaction with the course matters were taking both in domestic and in foreign politics and in the conduct of the war, and that they had incurred the suspicion of Signor Mussolini and of the Nazis. Similar views were expressed in the British Press, which emphasized that Signor Mussolini had jettisoned some of his most experienced collaborators in favour of a bunch of unknown nonentities whose only claim to elevation was that they were Fascist true believers who could be counted on to prove unswerving "yes-men" and not to air any ideas of their own, if they had any. It was also widely reported that the outgoing Ministers and their friends had been in close touch with the Crown Prince. That there was some kind of revolt against necessarily prosecuting the war to the bitter end with Germany is generally accepted. But this explanation only tells part of the story and does not account for the conspicuous decoration conferred on Count Grandi by the King, or for the appointment of Count Ciano to the Holy See which was thought to be on very good terms with the Royal Family and which naturally was interested in the restoration of peace to the world. The most likely explanation is that Signor Mussolini, partly following his own resolutions and partly egged on by Signor Farinacci and his pro-German supporters, got rid of the more independent and less extremist elements with the firm intention of prosecuting the war with redoubled vigour. But, not to burn all his boats, he did not break entirely with men whose services might, if matters turned out completely to the undoing of Italy, be utilized in the salvage of some scraps and pieces from the general wreckage.

Signor Scorza, then, was called <sup>1</sup> to the Party Secretaryship after a most wide-reaching change in the personnel of the administrative machine, determined by Signor Mussolini's apparently inflexible resolution not to modify either Fascist policy or the Fascist system, and at a moment when it was already evident that a collapse of the Axis armies in Tunisia must bring Italy into mortal peril. It soon became clear that the new broom was going to perform its proverbial functions. At the beginning of May Signor Scorza convoked the Party leaders and made them a harangue in which he discussed many of the Party problems of the day and found it necessary, though Fascism had already

<sup>1</sup> On April 17, 1943.

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been in power for nearly twenty-one years, to define the duties and characteristics of the ideal Fascist. What was interesting was that Signor Scorza championed the cause of the *bourgeoisie*. If, he said, the *bourgeois* was to be defined as a cynical, calculating, frightened individual, many such were to be found in every social class. Enough therefore of talk against the *bourgeoisie*, members of which had given to Fascism leaders, officers and magistrates. This passage was in direct opposition to many of Signor Mussolini's caustic remarks and to the would-be satirical sneers of the Fascist Press. But Signor Scorza grasped and had the courage to enunciate the obvious truth that it is useless to preach national unity if you vent your witticisms continually upon the mainstay of the nation. He also trod on many corns when he declared that political professionalism must be abolished, since it had led to a lowering of the level among the hierarchs and to a fear of losing one's job. As a matter of fact the professional bureaucratic hierarchs had, in many cases, developed into easygoing men who were satisfied with the policy of *laissez-faire*. Once they had entered on their career they did their best to avoid trouble and worry. They were content to be mere executors of regulations and only too often allowed themselves to become enmeshed in them.<sup>1</sup> Like most functionaries, the bureaucratic hierarchs of the Fascist Party never ventured to point out weaknesses and errors and to apply remedies, or to admit failings and shortcomings. On the contrary they tended to gloss over anything awkward. What, perhaps, irritated the hard-bitten Fascists of the rank and file even more acutely was the pompous state which the empty-headed bureaucrats too often affected. It was all very well to have reinstated authority and hierarchy. But Italian logic would not admit that respect for the office must connote respect for any upstart who happened to be filling that office. For the sake of decorum, it was said, we put half Italy into uniform, with grades, braid, epaulettes, stripes, uniforms for summer, for winter, for walking out, for sleeping. For the sake of prestige this might be justifiable, though a civilian population was accustomed to obeying authority even when it was not decked out in feathers and braid. But at least we reserved to ourselves the right and duty to point out that Signor X had committed such-and-such stupidities and ought to be dismissed. Criticism had, however, been damped down because the blunderer was cunning enough to identify himself with his office and to raise an outcry about sacrilege and treason to authority and

<sup>1</sup> *Regime Fascista* of May 12th, 1943.

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prestige. The fact was, as one spirited critic put it,<sup>1</sup>

"Too much fat has accumulated on too many bellies. . . . The Revolution is young and lithe and does not like capitalist structures, does not stop before the closed doors of Institutes, does not farm the land by murdering the farmers with a bombardment of circulars, forms and declarations, does not settle crises in luxurious offices, with magnificent typists for various uses, with uniformed porters, silver salvers for visiting cards, lobbies like the entrances to palaces, decorated in 15th-century or luxurious modern styles."

Signor Scorza lost no time in sharpening his pruning-knife, or rather his axe. There was an almighty upheaval among the officials in the Corporations, Confederations and other organizations. Even Count Volpi of Misurata, one of the richest men in the country, was displaced from the presidency of the Confederation of Industrialists. Still more fundamental was Signor Scorza's issue of a Party Order Sheet in which a complete revision of the functions and structure of the Party was announced. It had been notorious for many years that the Fascist regime had been a glorified form of a para-Statal Charity Organization and had established a vast bureaucracy, which in very many instances had not only been completely redundant but had actively interfered with and hampered the true State Administration. Signor Scorza now insisted that, if Signor Mussolini's orders were to be carried out efficiently, the Party as a whole must become more "vibrant and lively", and to that end must be simplified. The Party Order Sheet solemnly declared that many organizations which no longer corresponded to strictly functional requirements had been added in recent years to the original structure of the Party and were to be either abolished altogether or replaced by some simpler organization. Having thus got rid, at least on paper, of the Fascist equivalents of the Circumlocution and Red Tape and Sealing-Wax Departments, Signor Scorza proceeded to try to infuse fresh zeal into his subordinates by putting men who had seen active service into the places of those who had dodged their military obligations, and by exacting from all the higher officials a new oath of fidelity unto death to Signor Mussolini and the cause of the Fascist Revolution. A later Party Order Sheet declared that the Party badge might not be replaced by any other and that defaulters would be ejected as "unworthy to belong to the Party through lack of personal dignity and political courage". It laid down that the Party, though it

<sup>1</sup> Tenente Franco Spinelli in *Libro e Moschetto* of March 27th, 1943.

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did charity work, was not a charitable institution. "The Party is to be served, it does not serve", and was under no obligation to maintain such Fascists as, having served their mandatory period, returned to the ranks. A step further still was taken when the National Party Directorate submitted to Signor Mussolini through Signor Scorza an address "demanding" the fulfilment of ten points<sup>1</sup> considered by them as essential to the successful organization of resistance in the hour of danger. The presentation of this address aroused widespread comment, not so much on account of its contents, which for the most part broke no new ground, as on account of the novelty of the Directorate daring to put "demands" to Signor Mussolini. In some minds, in fact, the theory arose that Signor Scorza was even planning to substitute himself for his chief. Such a theory had nothing to commend it. So long as Signor Mussolini remained at the helm nobody else would be permitted by him to lay the course of the nation.

The address was, however, by no means devoid of interest. The mere fact that it covered so much familiar ground was in itself significant since it demonstrated that the regime was either culpably lax in its administration or else was impotent to carry out its own legislation and regulations. The most crying scandal of all, and the one which did the most harm to the Government, was the ubiquitous existence of the Black Market. Jugurtha is described as apostrophizing Rome as a city up for sale and doomed to perish soon if it should find a purchaser. There was no less corruption in Italy to-day than there was over 2,000 years ago. The phenomenon of the Black Market, said the National Directorate, is common to all countries at war, but "incompatible with Fascist ethics". So much the worse for Fascist ethics. The Black Market was irrepressibly rampant. The farmers kept back for their own consumption more than their legal quota and did not surrender to the State "pools" anything like all the remainder of their produce. The rationing regulations were notoriously flouted by restaurant keepers, who on meatless days served their clients with portions of meat concealed beneath heaped-up vegetables. As the list of articles subject to requisition lengthened, so the practice of hoarding increased. Not a day passed without cases of misdemeanours of one kind or other being reported in the Press. Heavy fines, however, and long terms of imprisonment and the stern reprimands of the Church were alike powerless. The profits were worth the risks. Many people quite openly declared that dealings on the Black Market were not only

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix Three.

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inevitable but justifiable. A woman giving her name and address in Caserta wrote a letter to the *Telegrafo* in April 1943 saying that she had five small daughters and was compelled to resort to the Black Market to procure the bare necessities of life. The Government regulations on foodstuffs were not observed in her town because many rationed goods were not supplied to the population for several months on end. Sugar had not been distributed since January. Eggs, instead of being available at the rate of one per head per week, had been available at the rate of one per person every five or six months. Meat was obtainable by the lucky few once a month, while the rest had to pay 50 or 60 lire a kg. for it. And so on. "Is it we", she asked finally, "who are guilty of encouraging the Black Market or is it those who are incapable of properly regulating the distribution of the foodstuffs mentioned and therefore force us, by sheer necessity, to fall into the clutches of the profiteers?" The *Popolo d' Italia*<sup>1</sup> of Milan, Signor Mussolini's own newspaper, conducted an inquiry into the defective distribution of coal in the city and came to the conclusion that cinemas and theatres could always obtain extra fuel through their Federations or through the Black Market. "Not a few" industrialists had received more coal than they needed and had sold some of it at high prices. Similar scandals were said to be prevalent in the wood and timber trades. The clandestine slaughtering of livestock was a frequent offence. Conditions clearly varied greatly from region to region, partly in relation to the fertility of the soil, partly owing to the goodness or badness of communications, and partly in proportion to the honesty of the local inhabitants and of the officials. Some highly-placed Fascist functionaries were caught out in the practice of various forms of misconduct and dishonesty. So far as foodstuffs were concerned jealousy and hatred of the Germans played no inconsiderable part. The Italian ration was smaller than the German, and this grievance was anything but mitigated when Marshal Goering made a speech declaring that whatever other nations in Europe might have to suffer the Germans should not go hungry.

There is no need to go into each one of the demands put forward by the Directorate. Many of the points raised have, in fact, already been touched upon in other chapters. The authors of the address sought to convey to the nation the impression that the leaders of the Fascist Party were as vigilant, active and determined as ever, and that if Italy were destined to succumb it would not be from the torpor and lassitude of her rulers. But what was interesting was the curious reaction of Signor

<sup>1</sup> Issue of April 27th, 1943.

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Mussolini. After an interval of many days, which was unconvincingly accounted for by Signor Pavolini as due to Signor Mussolini's revulsion against having his words taken down by stenographers, the text was issued of a long speech which was supposed to have been delivered to the National Directorate when he had carefully studied their proposals. The internal evidence suggests that whatever reply he may have vouchsafed did not take the form of the speech as published. Signor Mussolini did not so much damn the proposals with faint praise as praise them with faint damns. He admitted that many of the proposals were excellent but then proceeded to show why they were impracticable and unnecessary and impolitic. It was more than doubtful whether after this odd episode Signor Scorza and his colleagues could attain their fundamental objectives. What they did do by their "demands" was to confirm the view that the mass of the Italian people was heartily sick of an unpopular war; was tired to death of the Fascist regime; was as fundamentally impatient of all restraints upon the exercise of its strongly-marked individualism as ever; was reluctant to put the higher calls of self-denial and patriotism above the satisfaction of selfish, private interests, and, in its heart of hearts, lent but a sceptical ear to all the vapourings of its propagandists. There is a well-known story of an ancient Athenian who, on being asked why he had voted for the ostracism of Aristides, replied that he was tired of hearing him always called "The Just". The unending flow of Fascist propaganda had produced the same reaction in the minds of many Italians, the more so as many of the most impassioned journalists and broadcasters were strongly suspected of cynical insincerity. If the Italian people, manacled by the O.V.R.A. and the Gestapo, was for so long in no position to revolt, and if it was plunged by propaganda into a catalepsy, this was not to say that it accepted unquestioningly the mouthings of Fascist spokesmen. There could be too much of a good thing, even if it were granted that Fascism was a good thing. When this premise was not accepted not even the dangers of war could create a truly solid and patriotic Home Front.

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AS was to be expected, the Vatican is incurring in the present war the same sort of charges that were levelled against it in 1914-18. Just as Pope Benedict XV was accused by the Entente of favouring the Central Powers and by the Central Powers of favouring the Entente, so too Pope Pius XII has had to meet the angry remonstrances of both sets of belligerents that he is favouring their enemies. That this should be so is once again held up by the apologists of the Vatican as proof of the fundamental impartiality of the Holy Father.

Some of the charges have been ridiculously crude. The most blatant accusation was that levelled by Dr. Friedrich,<sup>1</sup> who declared that

“a careful perusal of the Papal Press and of the reports on interviews of high ecclesiastical authorities with Pius XI, and a study of the Encyclicals, have enabled me now to realize clearly the crushing responsibility of the Church in unleashing the present war. Just as the Vatican had condemned Fascism, it inevitably had to condemn National Socialism. Was it not a fact that these two revolutions were going to attempt to restore to all men the consciousness of their dignity and thus to come into conflict with the Church in the spiritual sphere?”

Dr. Friedrich went on to cite at great length a list of pronouncements of various kinds made since the coming to power of Herr Hitler by Pius XI, Cardinal Pacelli (now Pius XII), Cardinal Mundelein and other prelates forming what he termed “this barking chorus of sulky dogs” in order to justify his conclusion as to who are “the real enemies of religion and of peace”. It was, of course, quite true<sup>2</sup> that the Vatican disliked intensely many features both of Fascism and of Nazism, but this fact did not logically justify Dr. Friedrich’s elaborately constructed thesis. This attack did not long remain unanswered. Addressing a large crowd of workers on Whitsunday in the Belvedere Court of the Vatican, Pius XII referred to the “rumour” that the Pope wanted war, that he kept the war going by paying for its continuation, and that he

<sup>1</sup> On the German-controlled Radio Paris, May 23rd, 1943.

<sup>2</sup> See below in this chapter.



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was not working for peace. Never, he exclaimed, was a more atrocious calumny circulated. Who could fail to see that nobody had done more than the Pope to prevent the outbreak of war, its extension and its continuation? No one had invoked peace more incessantly, or done more to mitigate the horrors of war, and when in due time the relevant documents came to be published they would reveal the foolishness of such accusations.

Of the anti-Vatican activities of such men as Signori Farinacci and Scorza something has already been said.<sup>1</sup> Signor Farinacci has always taken the line that he is a true son of the Church, a more sincere Roman Catholic than is to be found in the editorial office of the *Osservatore Romano* or among the broadcasters of the Vatican Radio Station. How Signor Farinacci reconciled this claim to be a Catholic Wahabi with his violent anti-Semitism, which cuts across one of the fundamental principles of doctrine of the Church, is a mystery. His diatribes were, however, not taken seriously by anybody but himself and a few of his equally ill-instructed followers. Among these must be reckoned a peppery military chaplain by the name of Civati.

"We are," he wrote in the *Regime Fascista*, "and always shall be, on the side of the Church and its intangible and indisputable dogma. The Fascist Catholics will never challenge dogma and religion. But on the political plane they desire to feel, first and foremost, Italians, in spite of the super-national character of the Church. . . . Once again we affirm: we are with the Church and with the Pope, in dogma and in God's faith; with the wise King and the 'providential' Duce, in the defence and the progress of the country."

A third charge, and one to which the Roman Catholic Church is much more sensitive, is that since the Conciliation between Church and State of 1929 the Holy See has bargained away its international independence.

"A little money has changed hands; some promissory notes have been signed, and on February 11th the Lateran Treaty is signed. By that treaty the Vatican becomes a Preference shareholder in the Fascist regime."

This version<sup>2</sup> of the financial Convention is virtually repeated<sup>3</sup> in a less wilfully flippant form by another British author who has pointed out that Pius XI, in making a settlement with Signor Mussolini, did not realize the price he was paying, "the price of basing his whole finances

<sup>1</sup> Chapter Six.

<sup>2</sup> Hambloch, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> In *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, by G. T. Garratt. Penguin Special, 1938.

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upon the stability of Signor Mussolini's Fascist State", and who has maintained that

"It would be difficult for any impartial person not to trace some connexion between the still operative clauses of the Concordat and the attitude of the Pope and Italian Cardinals towards the Abyssinian venture".

At last, said one Rome newspaper, we have an Episcopate and Clergy who know, when necessary, how to place the authority deriving from the high ministry which they exercise at the service of the national interest. The Pope and Signor Mussolini had, in fact, approached the whole problem from two quite different points of view. Pius XI had hoped to make Italy safe for Catholicism. Signor Mussolini had hoped to make Heaven safe for Fascism, and, having spent about £20 millions of the public funds upon what he probably regarded as a highly speculative gamble, he was determined to get in this world full value for what he had bought. Small wonder, then, if those who had looked askance or with hesitant scepticism upon the Conciliation, began to wonder whether indeed the Pope had become, as the saying went, the King's private chaplain.

This is, perhaps, as good an opportunity as any of drawing a convenient distinction between the more purely political activities of the Vatican, its practical humanitarian activities, and the enunciation by the Pope during the war of various general moral principles, which have, indeed, a strongly political flavour but which for the moment are theoretical contributions to the problems of social justice and international order and reconstruction after the war. These different activities dovetail tightly into each other, but the distinction will probably help to give a clearer general picture of the multifarious activities of the Vatican.

It is not the Pope's task, said a recent Vatican broadcast,<sup>1</sup> to make a political stand. It is his duty to make a stand for the religious, ethical and cultural point of view. The Pope is neither for Communism nor Nationalism nor yet Capitalism. He endorses neither the conception of the Masses nor the myth of Race nor the methods of Cash. He proclaims the ideal of Love, he can only wish for the victory of the Cross. To-day's struggle is not for the victory of gold or of blood, but for the victory of the powers of Light over those of Darkness. If, declared the Pope to the Cardinals,<sup>2</sup> the Church should allow herself

<sup>1</sup> May 14th, 1943.

<sup>2</sup> Address on his Name Day, 1943.

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to be drawn into the vortex of exclusively earthly interests or that of purely human controversy, this would lay an even heavier burden upon him who has a mission to make himself all things to all men in the struggle of all men against all men in order to gain all for God. This attitude is, perhaps, not wholly dictated by the motives mentioned. When in 1917 Benedict XV issued his peace manifesto to the belligerents he suffered the fate of a mediator who has misjudged the timeliness of his appeal. Clemenceau at once interpreted the manifesto as a direct action for the benefit of the Central Powers and openly called Benedict XV "*Le Pape Boche*". The Vatican diplomat who had the task of drafting the manifesto was none other than the present Pope, then Nuncio to Berlin. The action of the Papacy was primarily interpreted by its critics as having been dictated by the wish to preserve a strong Austria as a sure defence of the Catholic world. Pius XII has doubtless decided not to burn his own fingers a second time, especially now that he must bear the final responsibility for any such step. Within the limits that he has set himself the Pope has, however, been politically very active. His first public pronouncement after his election showed that his predominant preoccupation was the preservation of peace, and it was certainly no fault of his if he was doomed to fight an uphill battle against the determination of Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to unleash war. He can have had few, if any, illusions as to his chances of deterring Herr Hitler. Relations between the Holy See and the Government of the Reich had been strained already for some years, although he himself and Herr von Papen had signed a Concordat in 1933. With Signor Mussolini he may, perhaps, have hoped for success when Italy's non-belligerency was proclaimed at the outbreak of the war. In spite of all the points of major or minor friction between Church and State the Lateran Agreements were standing, and the non-Catholic minorities in Italy were almost negligible. At the end of December 1939 there was a remarkable exchange of visits between the King and the Pope. The King went to the Vatican on December 21st, and a week later the Pope returned the visit by going to the Quirinal Palace, the official residence of the Popes until 1870, where he pronounced a striking and conciliatory address. Great significance was at once attached to these visits, which were thought not only to draw closer the bonds created in 1929 but also to foreshadow joint collaboration in a policy aiming at the restoration of peace. The hopes thus openly and ardently expressed on all hands evidently frightened and angered Signor Mussolini and his German overlord. Signor Mussolini

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was afraid that his political position in relation to his German ally was in danger of becoming compromised. An entry in my diary records that on January 2nd, 1940, all the correspondents of the Foreign Press were summoned to the Ministry of Popular Culture (i.e. the propaganda headquarters) where we were requested: (i) not to speak about any Italian peace proposals. Signor Mussolini had at the moment no such intentions; (ii) not to attribute political significance to the meetings between the Pope and King; (iii) not to speak, as some correspondents had begun to do, about "the two Romes". There was only one Rome. We gathered that Signor Mussolini was annoyed over the stress laid upon the interchange of courtesies, and was particularly cross because when the Pope had said in the Quirinal that he hoped soon to see Signor Mussolini—who was ostentatiously not present—the King had replied that no doubt Signor Mussolini would soon pay a visit to His Holiness. The Vatican thereupon announced that Signor Mussolini would visit the Pope on January 4th and this statement was incautiously repeated by the *Stefani* newsagency. The report was sharply denied, and Signor Mussolini did not pay the visit.

This episode must have opened the eyes of the Pope, as it did those of many other people. It was clearly a pointer to the direction to which Signor Mussolini's policy was directed. Another pointer was given soon afterwards. Since the outbreak of the war the popularity of the *Osservatore Romano* had been much enhanced.<sup>1</sup> As the Italian Press fell more and more under German influence and gave an increasingly unfair and distorted view of the war and of all political developments having any bearing on it, people began to turn in ever greater numbers to the one newspaper in which they could find also the news and views of the Allies and in which they could read independent comments. Of these the most brilliant were those written by G. G., initials which concealed the name of Professor Guido Gonella. Professor Gonella is a writer of outstanding ability. He has an extraordinarily acute mind, and is gifted with the power of seizing at once upon the essentials of a situation, of analysing it with remorseless logic and of clothing his thoughts in admirably lucid language. No other Italian journalist is in the same street with him. His articles in the *Osservatore Romano* are all the more refreshing because the language used in that journal is frequently *sui generis*; archaic, involved and pedantic. The existence of this newspaper, the sale of which was only limited by the capacity of its presses, was a thorn in the Fascist side. The *Osservatore Romano*

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Three.

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gave as much prominence to the *communiqués* of the Allies as it did to those of the Nazis. It condemned Germany's aggression against Norway, pointing out that there had been a breach of Norwegian neutrality, whereas the Fascist newspapers proclaimed that the Norwegians had violated their own neutrality in concert with the British and French. The newspaper published in a prominent position the Pope's messages<sup>1</sup> to the King of the Belgians, the Queen of Holland and the Grand Duchess of Luxemburg sent when the Fascist Press was declaring that no pity should be wasted upon countries which had not been strictly neutral and which had joined in the application of "sanctions" against Italy. A regular hue and cry was raised against the *Osservatore Romano*, the yelping pack of the Fascist Press being led by Signor Farinacci's *Regime Fascista*. Various methods were used to circumvent the circulation of a journal the sale of which on Italian territory was safeguarded by the Lateran Treaty. Copies were bought up and destroyed as fast as they were put on sale. Intending buyers were intimidated by the sight of the newspaper being burned or torn up in the streets. The newspaper kiosks were watched by Fascist toughs who set upon purchasers of the journal, to whom they, reverting to their earlier tradition, administered doses of castor oil. After a brief struggle, during which it suspended publication for a few days, the *Osservatore Romano* was compelled to surrender and to appear shorn of its political comments. It was an ignominious capitulation, as ignominious as the subsequent instructions of the Secretariat of State to the Vatican Radio in 1941 not to mention Germany, thus leaving the field clear to the lies of Nazi propaganda.

The attitude of the Vatican gave the impression of being bafflingly inconsistent in what may be regarded as its more short-term policy. To take a few examples, the Pope's address to the Polish colony in Rome on September 30th, 1939, caused, as I well remember, much disappointment because he did not castigate the German and Russian invasions of Poland. But a month later, in his first Encyclical,<sup>2</sup> he made amends by making an obvious allusion to Germany in words reprobating efforts to banish Christ, the rejection of the universal standard of morality in international relations, governmental usurpation of the supreme authority belonging to God alone and the unilateral breach of treaties. The Pope himself reacted more mildly than might have been expected to the Nazis riding rough-shod over the spiritual and material rights of the Church in Germany, but he allowed the

<sup>1</sup> May 10th, 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *Summi Pontificatus*, of October 1939.

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Vatican Radio to attack the Nazi persecution of the Poles and the Catholic Church in Poland. Later he muzzled the Vatican Radio, but he firmly refused all the German and Italian efforts to make him preach an anti-Bolshevist crusade after Germany's aggression upon the U.S.S.R. He kept silent when St. Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey and many of our churches and hospitals were bombed, and yet he frequently showed the utmost anxiety lest Rome should be bombed, although Signor Mussolini had acknowledged with boastful pride that he had sent Italian airmen to take part in the Battle of Britain. He must have known that after the treacherous Japanese attack upon Pearl Harbour his acceptance of a Japanese diplomat accredited to the Holy See would be regarded as an affront to the United Nations, and yet he has accepted a Japanese representative. Just before Signor Mussolini declared war it was feared that the Pope would not stand upon the rights of missions accredited to the Holy See as safeguarded under Article XII of the Lateran Treaty. If representations were made to the Italian Government they were not pressed home. H.M. Minister and other heads of mission were forced to find an asylum inside the Vatican City.

Of the Vatican's more general and long-term policy towards the different countries only a bare outline is here possible. It is clear that the position of the Church is different in this war from what it was in 1914. Under Article XV of the Treaty of London (1915) Great Britain, France and Russia promised to support "such opposition as Italy may show to any proposal tending to introduce a representative of the Holy See into any negotiations for peace and for the settlement of questions raised by the present war". This hostility to the Holy See has by no means wholly died away. The *Kulturkampf* of Bismarck was child's-play in comparison with the ferocious animosity displayed by the Nazi German Government towards Roman Catholicism. Communist Russia soon became the acknowledged Public Enemy Number One of the Roman Catholic Church, and, though this enmity has of late not been proclaimed quite so insistently and vociferously as it was under Pius XI, any modification in the attitude of the Vatican is probably to be ascribed not so much to a belief in a change of the Bolshevist heart<sup>1</sup> as to a feeling that there is precious little to choose between the Communist U.S.S.R. and Nazi Germany under its present regime, and that therefore it would be unjust to proclaim a crusade for the *beaux*

<sup>1</sup> This was written before the *rapprochement* between M. Stalin and the Russian Orthodox Church.

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*yeux* of such an infidel as Herr Hitler. In Great Britain the position of the Catholic Church is probably better than it was in 1914, when the Ulster problem had rekindled sectarian animosities, and it certainly improved during the all too short cardinalate of Cardinal Hinsley. The regime of Marshal Pétain has sought and won at least the conditional and qualified support of the Church, which by its support of moral resistance to the Germans has probably strengthened its position with the masses. In Latin America there has been an increase of the Roman Catholic population which is rapidly redressing the balance of influence as between the Old and New Worlds. And last, but by no means least, there is Italy. Whereas the suspicions and jealousy of a Salandra-Sonnino Cabinet could so far prevail as to obtain the insertion of the Article above-mentioned in an international treaty, no such course is open to an Italian Government since 1929. Under Article XXIV of the Lateran Treaty the Holy See declares that it "desires to remain and will remain outside all temporal competitions between other States and outside all international Congresses held for such objects" unless rival parties unite in appealing to its mission of peace. Whether Fascist Italy under Signor Mussolini has been any more truly religious than was the Italy of Signor Salandra may be doubted. Signor Mussolini himself runs small risk of ever being beatified on account of his having led a life of outstanding piety and of devotion to the Roman Catholic Church. On the contrary Signor Mussolini's doctrines on the totalitarian nature of the Fascist State made him averse from the interference of the Church in political and other mundane affairs, and led him to claim that unto Caesar should be rendered not merely the things that are Caesar's but also things which, in the eyes of the Holy See, appertain unto God. Except, therefore, in very special circumstances a totalitarian Government would not be likely to take the initiative in inviting the Holy See to exercise its mission of peace and to mediate in political disputes. The Lateran Treaty, though it purports to settle the international standing of the Holy See, is, of course, only binding upon the Holy See and the Italian Government. It is in no way binding upon other Governments. So long, however, as the Treaty is in force it gives to the Holy See a moral claim to expect from the Italian Government at least a show of outward benevolence, and therefore if foreign Governments did express a desire for the Holy See to exercise its good offices it would be difficult for the Italian Government to raise serious objections. It is, of course, conceivable that a totalitarian State might be under the rule of a man with deeper religious convictions

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than those professed by Signor Mussolini. Upon the whole, however, the fundamental conceptions of a totalitarian regime render impossible a complete harmony between Church and State, while the replacement of the Fascist regime by, as seems the most probable development, a more Liberal and democratic Government<sup>1</sup> would not tend to revive strongly theocratic influences.

So long as the Pope is an Italian and Italians are the strongest single nationality in the Curia, it is almost inevitable that the Holy See should feel a special sympathy towards Italy.\* But this does not necessarily mean that the Holy See is in the pocket of the Italian Prime Minister. Appearances may sometimes point in that direction. The anxiety of Pius XII to save Rome from the bombs of our airmen seemed to many of the Allies to argue an unjustifiable solicitude for the capital of an enemy country. The Allies were fully alive to the religious, historical and artistic traditions of the Eternal City, their debt to which was indeed explicitly acknowledged by their leaders. Had they forgotten the contribution of Rome to the civilization of the world and been swayed only by thoughts of revenge they would have bombed Rome early in the war as a reprisal for Signor Mussolini's sending his airmen to participate, as he hoped, in the indiscriminate destruction of London, and as a punishment for his unnecessarily venomous and mendacious attacks upon Great Britain and the United States of America. We did not do so, although Rome was at our mercy. When, however, the military situation made further inaction impossible; when Rome had become an increasingly important military target owing to the development on its outskirts of new war factories and owing to its being the focal point of Italy's railway system; when Rome housed not only the Italian Government but many military missions of the German ally, the decision to bomb Rome was taken on purely military grounds. The Pope was assured in advance that every possible precaution would be taken not to endanger the Vatican City or other Papal domains, and the American airmen detailed for the enterprise were carefully instructed in the topography of Rome and ordered to bomb in daylight when the risk of error would be as small as possible. These instructions were carefully carried out and no bombs fell within three or four miles of the Vatican City. If the bombs did, unfortunately, hit a few civilian buildings and damaged (apparently by blast) the Basilica of San Lorenzo in the neighbourhood of the San Lorenzo railway marshalling yards, some regrettable damage was almost inevitable and could not in

<sup>1</sup> Latent in the first measures of the Badoglio Cabinet.



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common fairness be held up against us as showing that the Allies had violated their pledge to attack only legitimate military objectives. No such charge, in fact, was formulated by the Pope, who after having visited in person the Basilica and the devastated area of San Lorenzo, addressed a letter to Cardinal Marchetti-Selvaggiani, the Cardinal Vicar of Rome. Although the Pope must have been fully acquainted with the military reasons for the bombardment he showed no understanding of them whatsoever. Despite the solemn assurances given him he declared that the Vatican City, very loosely described as "almost in the centre of Rome", was exposed to the danger of air attacks; and from the depths of his "wounded heart" he lamented that the presence in Rome of Papal property, of priceless art treasures and libraries, and the fact that he had displayed impartiality "towards everyone without distinction of nationality or religion" had not availed to avert the dreaded blow. The Pope, in short, made it clear that he was primarily concerned to save the original seat of Roman Catholicism and the city of which he is the Bishop. To the existence in Rome of the Fascist regime he made no specific allusion. There is no reason to suppose that any love was lost between the Holy See and the Fascist regime collectively, whatever the natural love of an Italian Pope for his native country. Any solicitude evinced for the fate of the Fascist regime proceeded not so much from love of that regime as from the conviction that the overthrow of Fascism, accompanied possibly by that of the Monarchy, was bound in any case to throw temporarily out of gear some of the machinery of the Vatican and might conceivably usher in a longer or shorter period of disorder, chaos, bloody acts of private vengeance and class struggles. Hence, after Signor Mussolini's fall, the support given by the Vatican to the Conservative-Liberal-Monarchist Government of Marshal Badoglio.

For the humanitarian activities of the Vatican there can be nothing but praise. The Pope and the Vatican officials have done invaluable work in alleviating the hard lot of prisoners of war, refugees and interned civilians everywhere. Influence and persuasion have been brought to bear to mitigate the sufferings of the starving in Belgium and Greece. The Pope has made impassioned appeals for the Christian treatment of the suffering civilian populations under an enemy occupation. He has done his best to counter the policy deliberately pursued by Signor Mussolini and his henchmen by condemning the inculcation of the spirit of vengeance and hatred. He has raised his voice against the wilful terrorism of indiscriminate bombing and the massacres of

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civilians. He has behaved with conspicuous kindness to the few British prisoners of war who have succeeded in escaping to the asylum of the Vatican City.

It remains to consider the Pope's views upon the problems of social justice and international order and reconstruction after the war. The general trend of his thought was embodied in his first Encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, published at the end of October 1939. In this powerful document the Pope examined the causes of the war. In effect he attributed to agnosticism and to the abandonment of religion as the fundamental basis of morality in both public and private affairs the growth of those evils which had produced the war. He picked out for special mention two great errors. The first of these was the denial of that "law of human solidarity and charity which is ordained and imposed by our common origin and by the equality of rational nature in all men, whatever the people to which they belong". The Christian spirit was not the enemy of patriotism, but legitimate love of native country should not blind us to "the all-embracing nature of Christian charity, which calls for consideration for others". These words were a strong condemnation of Racism and excessive Nationalism. The second great error was seen by the Pope in the arrogation by the civil authority to itself of an unrestricted field of action lying at the mercy of the variable tide of human will or of the dictates of fortuitous historical claims. The Pope insisted that such undue elevation of the State, though it might achieve momentary success, was baleful and would in the long run result in the undermining of international law and morality and would place the destinies of peoples at the whim of their rulers. Thus international cooperation would be excluded. Harmonious relations between the nations must be based upon respect for corresponding rights to independence, life and the possibility of development along the path of civilization. There must be fidelity to duly accepted treaties and assurance that both parties were ready to enter into discussions and to avoid recourse to force or threats of force. It was possible that treaties might come to require revision owing to changed circumstances, but such revision should be the outcome of open discussion and not of the view that treaties are just ephemeral and subject to unilateral denunciation. The sword, he added, can impose conditions of peace but does not create peace. This approval of the principle of treaty revision was, naturally, seized upon with glee by the Fascists, but his statement in general was received with mixed feelings as it was seen to apply alike to all totalitarian regimes, whether

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established in Rome or Berlin, Moscow or Madrid.

These broad principles were embodied in three successive Christmas addresses to the College of Cardinals. In his message of Christmas 1939 the Pope laid down five postulates of a just peace:—(i) All nations, great or small, powerful or weak, must be assured the right to life and independence. One nation's will to live must not entail sentence of death for another. When this equality of rights has been destroyed or endangered reparation must be made by the rules of justice and reciprocity. (ii) To ensure the durability of order thus established the nations must be freed from the slavery of competition in armaments and from the danger that material force be employed tyrannically to violate right. Every peace settlement must give fundamental importance to an agreed and progressive disarmament and make arrangements for its loyal execution. (iii) The nations must study and profit by the experiences of the past. And since it is difficult, if not impossible, to foresee and safeguard everything at the moment of peace negotiations, when passion and bitterness still bear their sway, juridical institutions should be established to guarantee the faithful execution of agreements and, in case of need, to revise and modify them. Thus there will be honourable acceptance of a treaty, and arbitrary and unilateral infringements and interpretations will be avoided. (iv) Attention should be given to the needs and just claims of nations and peoples and of ethnic minorities. Even if these claims have not always a basis of strict right, yet they merit sympathetic examination, so that they may be satisfied by peaceful means and, if necessary, by a fair and wise revision of treaties. (v) Even the most complete arrangements will be doomed to failure, unless the leaders of the nations and the nations themselves become increasingly imbued with the spirit of intimate and lively responsibility, with a hunger and thirst for justice and with universal love. The Pope admitted the seriousness of the difficulties standing in the way of the attainment of these ends, but this was a crusade worthy of pure and generous hearts.

In his address a year later the Pope again laid down five necessary premises for a New Order. Before enumerating these premises the Pope told the assembled Cardinals that in such a strife of opinion the Church could not be invoked to listen to one side more than to another. Within the divine laws there was a wide sphere in which the most varied forms of political life had ample freedom of expression. The effects of one or other political system, however, depended on circumstances and reasons which, considered in themselves, were beyond the

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scope of the Church's activity. The Pope then laid down his premises as follows:—(1) Victory over the hatred which divides the nations to-day and the disappearance of systems and actions which breed this hatred. As a matter of fact, in some countries an unbridled propaganda is to be seen; it does not recoil from methodical distortion of the truth in order to show the enemy nations in a falsified and vilifying light. He, however, who really wants the good of the people and wants to contribute to the future cooperation of nations and to preserve this cooperation from incalculable damage, will consider it as his sacred duty to uphold the natural ideals of Truth, Justice and Charity. (2) Victory over distrust, which exerts a paralysing pressure on international law and makes all honest understanding impossible. Therefore, return to the principle of mutual trust. Return to the loyalty to treaties without which the secure cooperation of nations and, especially, the living side by side of strong and weak nations, are inconceivable. The foundation of justice is loyalty, reliability and truth to the pledged word, and to the understanding which has been reached. (3) Victory over the dismal principle that self-interest is the foundation and aim of Law and that might can create right. This principle is bound to upset all international relations and is unacceptable to all weaker nations. Therefore, return to honest, serious and moral international relations. This conception does not exclude the desire for the honourable improvement of conditions or the right to defend oneself if peaceful life has been attacked, or to repair the damage sustained thereby. (4) Victory over those potential conflicts arising out of the disequilibrium of world economy. Therefore, a new economic order has gradually to be evolved which gives all nations the means to secure for their citizens an appropriate standard of life. (5) Victory over the kind of egotism which, relying on its own power, aims at impairing the honour and sovereignty of nations, as well as the sound, just and ordered liberty of individuals. This egoism has to be replaced by a genuine Christian solidarity of a legal and economic character, and by a brotherly cooperation of the nations, the sovereignty of which has been duly secured.

At Christmas 1941 Pius XII again enunciated five principles of the same general character which were the fundamental conditions of a "truly New Order" that should guarantee to all peoples a just and lasting peace. The conditions were defined as follows:—(i) Within the limits of a New Order founded on moral principles there is no room for violation of the freedom, integrity and security of other States, no

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matter what may be their territorial extension or their capacity for defence. If it is inevitable that the powerful States should, by reason of their greater potentialities and their power, play leading roles in the formation of economic groups, comprising not only themselves but smaller and weaker States as well, it is nevertheless indispensable that in the interests of the common good they, and all others, respect the rights of those smaller States to political freedom, to economic development, and to the adequate protection in the case of conflicts between nations of that neutrality which is theirs according to the natural, as well as international, law. (ii) Within the limits of a New Order founded on moral principles there is no place for open or occult oppression of the cultural and linguistic characteristics of national minorities, for the hindrance or restriction of their economic resources, for the limitation or abolition of their natural fertility. The more conscientiously the Government of a State respects the right of minorities, the more confidently and the more effectively can it demand from its subjects a loyal fulfilment of those civil obligations which are common to all citizens. (iii) Within the limits of a New Order founded on moral principles there is no place for that cold and calculating egoism which tends to hoard economic resources and materials destined for the use of all, to such an extent that . . . the nations less favoured by nature are not permitted access to them. In this regard, it is perhaps a source of great consolation to see admitted the necessity of a participation of all in the natural riches of the earth even on the part of those nations which, in the fulfilment of this principle, belong to the category of givers and not of receivers. It is, however, in conforming to the principles of equity that a solution of a question so vital to the world economy should be arrived at methodically and in easy stages. If, in the future peace, this point were not to be courageously dealt with, there would grow up between peoples bitter dissensions and burning jealousies, which would lead eventually to new conflicts. It must, however, be noticed how closely the satisfactory solution of this problem is connected with the next fundamental point. (iv) Within the limits of a New Order, founded on moral principles, once the more dangerous principles of armed conflict have been eliminated there is no case for total warfare or for a mad rush to armaments. The calamity of a world war, with the economic and social ruin and the moral dissolution and breakdown which follow in its train, could not be permitted to envelop the human race for a third time. In order that mankind may be preserved from such a misfortune it is essential to proceed with

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sincerity and honesty to a progressive limitation of armaments. The lack of equilibrium between the exaggerated armaments of the powerful States and the limited armaments of the weaker ones is a menace to harmony and peace among nations, and demands that a peaceful and proportionate limit be placed upon production and possession of offensive weapons. In proportion to the degree in which disarmament is effected, means must be found to ensure that the norm, "pacts must be observed", will once again enjoy its vital and moral function in the juridical relations between States. To procure the rebirth of mutual trust, certain institutions must be established which will merit the respect of all, and which will dedicate themselves to the most noble office of guaranteeing the sincere observance of treaties and of promoting in accordance with the principles of law and equity necessary corrections and revisions of such treaties. (v) Within the limits of a New Order founded on moral principles, there is no place for the persecution of religion and of the Church. From a lively faith in a personal and transcendent God there springs a sincere and unyielding moral strength, which informs the whole course of life; for faith is not only a virtue, it is also the divine gift by which all the virtues enter the temple of the soul, and it constitutes that strong and tenacious character which does not falter before the rigid demands of reason and justice.

The Pope's Christmas allocution of 1942 was of less internationally political interest, and was primarily devoted to a consideration of the fundamental laws of the internal order of State and people. Since, however, as the Pope pointed out, international relations and internal order are intimately related a brief summary should be made of his "first five milestones" on the path towards a new social order:— (i) Cooperation in restoring to the human person the dignity given it by God, and opposition to the excessive herding together of men as if they were a soulless mass. Encouragement of the fundamental personal rights to develop one's corporal, intellectual and moral life; of the right, for example, to worship God, to work for the maintenance of family life, to use material goods in keeping with one's own duties and social limitations. (ii) Rejection of every form of materialism which sees in the people only a herd of individuals to be treated arbitrarily. Defence of the indissolubility of marriage. The securing for every family, and for its domestic servants, a dwelling where a materially and morally healthy family life may be led. Care that the good influence of home upon the children is not destroyed in schools

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controlled by the spirit of materialism. (iii) The inherent dignity of work to be restored, together with the ensuring of a just and adequate wage, and of an assured, if modest, private property for all classes. Higher education for working-class children of promise, and the smoothing down of points of friction arising from privilege or class interests. (iv) A complete rehabilitation of the juridical order. Recognition of the individual's inalienable right to juridical security and immunity from all arbitrary attacks. The establishment of clear, juridical rules which may not be upset by unwarranted appeals to a supposed popular sentiment or by merely utilitarian considerations. (v) Cooperation in restoring the State and its power to the service of human society, to the full recognition of the respect due to the human person and his efforts to attain his eternal destiny.

There should be no need to refer further to the series of public utterances which the Pope and high prelates of the Church have made. The quotations given above illustrate abundantly the general policy and attitude of the Vatican. The passionate sincerity of purpose and the nobility of the views put forward by Pius XII cannot be called in question by any but wilfully blind and bigoted opponents. What is more open to doubt is the international prestige and authority of the Holy See. Pius XI, it is probably fair to say, did not have the intellectual stature of his successor. But Pius XI was a man and a Pope of immense physical and moral courage, who had roundly and promptly denounced the immoral aberrations and excesses of Racialism, the offences to Christian civilization of Communist atheism, the anti-Christian manifestations of Nazi neo-paganism, and the Statolatry of Fascism with equally uncompromising vigour. If he condoned and countenanced the Abyssinian War and thus himself cast a slur upon his impartiality in an issue of high moral importance, he did not show himself such a "good Italian" as some of his Bishops. It is vain to speculate how he would have acted and spoken had he lived to be confronted by the problems that are harassing Pius XII. It is hard, however, to believe that a man of his character and temperament would have submitted so far as the present Pope has done to certain acts of Axis blackmail, or would have clothed his thoughts so often in such cryptic language. It is perfectly clear from the exculpatory tone of many of the Vatican Radio broadcasts and also from articles in the neutral Press bearing marks of inspiration that the Holy See is not unaffected by the criticism that the Pope has spoken too little, too vaguely and too diplomatically. The frequent references to the possi-

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bility of the Pope exercising his mediation are significant, and must portend what is after all the not unnatural ambition of the Holy Father to promote the restoration of peace to the world. What, however, is not so certain is whether the almost pedantic determination of Pius XII to observe the most scrupulous neutrality—one thinks of the famous election scene in *Thackeray* where the successful candidate fought under the banner of "Uncompromising Toleration"—may not defeat its own purpose, weaken rather than strengthen the spiritual prestige of his office, and thus diminish the volume of readiness in the Democracies to accept his cooperation in the restoration of peace. For the Vatican that would be a doubly heavy blow. It would not only undermine the Pope's international position, but it would also most seriously affect the part to be played by the Church in Italy after the collapse of Fascism.



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SIGNOR GAYDA supplied the best yardstick with which to measure the achievements and failures of Fascism when he wrote that it was easy enough to drain marshes, build roads and change the face of the countryside, but that it was quite another thing to create a new mentality and a new spirit of discipline.

The material achievements of Fascism are written up and down the length and breadth of the country. Vast sums of money were spent upon public works of all kinds. High roads and motor roads; railways; ports and harbours; hydroelectric plants; housing for the working classes and hospitals; swimming-baths and stadia for sport in all its forms; schools and universities; afforestation and land reclamation; reservoirs, canals and embankments; archaeological excavations; town-planning; civilian airfields—these are only the most obvious items in the long list of all the undertakings that have been tackled since Fascism came into power. According to statements issued on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the March on Rome in October 1942, 33,634 million lire were spent from 1922 to 1942 by the Ministry of Public Works. Of this sum 3,126 million lire were spent on housing for the people, 940 millions on school buildings, 1,937 millions on State buildings and 2,060 millions on the reconstruction of zones visited by calamities. From 1862 to 1922, it was slyly added, Public Works did not cost above 11,000 million lire. This disingenuous comparison did not mention that in 1862 there was no United Italy and did not recall that the value of the lira was quite different. Other statistics published on the same occasion showed that during the two decades of the Fascist regime 3,400 million lire had been spent upon the building of new roads, and 6,280 million lire upon putting existing roads into modern order. New railway construction claimed 3,000 million lire, and the number of kilometres of electrified lines rose from 700 to 5,428. Maritime constructions cost 2,955 million lire, while 612 million lire were spent upon the improvement of inland waterways. Works of hygiene cost 1,655 million lire. It was further stated that there had been constructed 3,310 kilometres of aqueducts, 4,064 kilometres of embankments and 19,160 kilometres

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of canals. Much attention was given to Land Reclamation, the most conspicuous example of which was the draining of the Pontine Marshes, near Rome. The area drained comprised about 80,000 hectares, upon which 5 townships were built and some 3,000 peasant families installed. The encouragement of agriculture in its various forms was one of the main activities of the regime. In 1925 Signor Mussolini began his "Battle of the Grain", the objective being to make Italy as far as possible self-supporting in the production of wheat by raising the annual total from 50 to 80 million quintals. This figure was in fact just reached in 1937 and exceeded in the exceptional harvest of 1938, but it has since receded. The area under cultivation only rose from 4.7 million hectares in 1925 to 5 millions in 1938, so that the increase has been achieved by improved methods and a greater use of fertilizers. The average yield per hectare rose from 11.5 quintals during 1921-5 to 14.6 quintals for the years 1931-5 and even totalled 16.3 quintals in the exceptional year 1938.

It must not, of course, be thought that in executing this vast programme the Fascist regime broke new ground to the extent to which it laid claim. The much-trumpeted *Bonifica Integrale* or Integral Land Reclamation work was as old as the Etruscans. The Grand Dukes of Tuscany had undertaken the ambitious enterprise of reclaiming the Val di Chiana in the south-eastern region of their domains. Prince Torlonia, whose family name is connected with numerous villas and palaces, spent large sums of money upon transforming Lake Fucino into an enormous granary. The reclamation of the Pontine Marshes had been essayed in the days of classical Rome, and, more recently, under the Popes. All due credit should be given to Fascism for having succeeded where its predecessors had failed. It must, however, be pointed out that the enterprise has been extremely expensive, costing, it is calculated, something like 5,000 to 7,000 lire per hectare. The enterprise, in fact, was not executed simply and solely for the purpose of providing an additional 80,000 hectares of agricultural land. It was executed because it resulted in the clearing up of one of the last zones infected by malaria and, not the least consideration, because, being situated so near to Rome, it afforded a first-class subject of propaganda for the foreign visitor. In common fairness to the Fascist regime it must be allowed that not only did it accomplish a vast programme of public works but that this programme was more or less rationalized. If many of the schemes brought into being by Fascism were not original and already existed in the archives of the Ministry of Public Works,

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far too many of them had remained only on paper or had been left incomplete. This state of affairs was due primarily to the instability of Italian Cabinets under a Parliamentary system which the inhabitants of United Italy were only slowly and laboriously learning to administer. In the second place the earlier representatives of United Italy were sharply divided by regional rivalries and antagonisms. There was the conflict of interest between the more industrialized North and the almost exclusively agricultural South. There was the disdain felt by the North and South for one another, a disdain which permeated all classes from the aristocracy to the working man. These regional rivalries were reflected inevitably in Parliament. Every candidate for Parliament promised his constituents that the public money-bags should be opened for their benefit, and the unfortunate Cabinet was torn by the conflicting claims of its supporters and was prone to throw sops to the more influential among them without due regard to the needs of the nation as a whole. Fascism mitigated, even if it did not wholly suppress these rivalries. If powerful Fascists succeeded in winning the acceptance of the projects sponsored by them, the continuity of the regime at least resulted in the plans, once adopted, being as a rule put into execution. Signor Mussolini, moreover, hit upon a brilliant expedient for ensuring that schemes, once started, should be executed. He fixed a date which was to be an annual milestone. That date was April 21st, the traditional anniversary of the foundation of Rome. He chose that date also to be the Italian Labour Day and, further, the day upon which the annual Fascist Levy was ceremoniously carried out. The Fascist Levy was the system under which young Fascists passed from one class of organization to another and a senior organization. By selecting a given annual date for the "inauguration" of new public works Signor Mussolini not only set a day upon which enterprises must either be completed or have reached a definite stage, but he linked together the achievements of the present with the traditional accomplishment of the past and with the promise of the future to which the torch was being entrusted.

Nor is it only with bricks and mortar, with high-tension wires and ferro-concrete, with aqueducts and smiling cornfields that Fascism has made its mark. It is quite impossible here to explain the complicated machinery of the Corporative State. It must suffice baldly to state that the fundamental purpose of the Corporative system was to put a rigidly planned and controlled economy in the place of economic liberalism with its catchword of *laissez-faire*, and to bring this about by

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closely controlling and guiding not only the collective labour relations between masters and men but also the economic relations between the different categories of the national production. The protoplasm in this vast organization was the *sindacato*. There are<sup>1</sup> many thousands of these syndicates in which are separately represented employers and employees drawn from the same occupational groups. The Corporations, which have given their name to the whole system, were 22 in number and assembled together—and this was their distinctive feature—equal numbers of representatives of employers' and workers' syndical organizations together with members of the Fascist Party and technical experts. In between the syndicates and Corporations there were various other bodies, of which the most important were the 9 Confederations, 4 of which were formed from employers and 4 from employees, while the 9th was *sui generis*, being the Confederation of professional men and artists. It was a condition that the representatives on all these bodies should be of "sound political conduct". What that meant goes without saying. This machinery was, in short, intended to put into practice Signor Mussolini's formula "everything within the State, nothing against the State, nothing outside the State". This formula naturally meant that one of the problems to which Fascism most quickly turned its attention was that of education. The Jesuits are said to have declared that so long as they might have charge of a child for the first seven years of its life they did not mind into whose hands it subsequently passed. Signor Mussolini went one better. Not only did he begin his "cradle-snatching" by forming the organization of tiny tots known as "The Wolf's Cubs", little children from 4 to 8 years of age, but he kept his hand firmly upon the youths until they passed into the Army and so escaped from the direct control of the Fascist Party. The first reforms in the educational system were introduced by Professor Giovanni Gentile,<sup>2</sup> a philosopher who had learned much from Benedetto Croce—for many years reckoned as one of the most intractable opponents of Fascism. Professor Gentile's great object was to bring the schools into closer touch with life, to weaken the predominant influence of the text-book and of parrot-like learning by rote. He reintroduced the teaching of the Roman Catholic religion into the schools. But the Gentile reforms were not popular. His spirit was aloof from the early exuberances of Fascism. The un-

<sup>1</sup> "Are", because apparently the syndicates are to be preserved upon a more truly democratic basis.

<sup>2</sup> See *Mussolini's Italy*, by Herman Finer. Gollancz, 1935.

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educated hooligans who so largely abounded in the Fascist Party distrusted a philosopher who had been tainted by Liberalism, and teachers and students alike were uneasy at his insistence that faith was not to be confused with formulae, or the life of the mind with a card of admission to the Fascist Party. But though Professor Gentile soon resigned, certain undoubted improvements were made. Attendance at school, which had previously been compulsory up to the age of 12, was now made obligatory for two years more, and attendance was more rigorously enforced. A number of other changes were introduced which for the most part brought more and more Fascist ideas and organization into the schools, and finally in 1939 Signor Bottai published the School Charter, which was intended to transform schooling "until now the preserve of a *bourgeois* society, into a school of the Fascist people and the Fascist State". Attendance was considered a civic duty and a fusion was made between the scholastic and the political development of the Youth.

Even recreation, to take one final illustration, was carefully organized by the Fascist regime. In 1925 was established the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* with the purpose of fostering the healthy and advantageous employment of the free hours of intellectual and manual workers by means of institutions directed to the development of their physical, intellectual and moral capacity. This organization, membership of which is voluntary, has over 4 million members and provides mental and physical activities of all kinds. Every branch of sport is encouraged. Much attention is given to the theatre. Lectures are given on every conceivable topic. Holiday camps and cheap excursions are arranged. Everything, in short, was done to wean the young Italians away from the café and the brothel, to bring them out into the open air, to harden their muscles, and to give them a better knowledge and appreciation of the natural and artistic beauties of their country. Of all the creations of Fascism the *Dopolavoro* organization is probably that which is least open to criticism, and the continuance of which after Fascism may be welcomed by all Italians and friends of Italy. Other social measures introduced by Fascism can only be barely mentioned. Of the long list the most important,<sup>1</sup> probably, are the introduction of the 8-hour day for workmen and clerks in trade, industry and agriculture; the unification and coordination of measures concerning old age and disability insurance; the reorganization of the unemployment insurance service, and the perfecting and unification of measures for maternity insurance.

<sup>1</sup> According to the *Giornale d'Italia*, June 26th, 1943.

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This imposing record of achievement has, however, its less favourable aspects. The expenditure on Public Works was gaily sanctioned although since 1930 the Italian Budget has regularly shown a deficit. Various causes contributed to this, such as the heavy expenditure incurred upon rearmament and upon the foreign campaigns in Abyssinia and Spain, the increase in the costs of administration, due to the establishment of the Corporative machinery, and the expensive policy of autarky. It is calculated that the total indebtedness of the State is now about 450 milliards of lire. This is a very heavy burden for a country where, according to the experts, incomes and earnings are normally only about one-third of what they are in Great Britain. Taken as a whole, indeed, the normal standard of living in Italy is very low, and it has tended to fall since 1929 owing to world conditions, the shrinkage of Italy's foreign markets in conjunction with autarky, and the heavy expenditure on military matters. As has been mentioned previously elsewhere the publication of economic statistics ceased in June 1940,<sup>1</sup> but it is safe to assume that to-day the much-increased note circulation has virtually no gold backing. Even the much-boasted agricultural campaign of the regime has not ended in anything like an Austerlitz. The Italian peasant is as conservative as is the peasant in most countries, and in part owing to his stubborn recalcitrance, in part owing to topographical difficulties and the exigencies of the climate, old-fashioned methods are still commonly practised. The champions of agriculture complain that even now not enough has been done for an industry which normally furnishes almost half of Italy's exports and provides nearly half of the population with its occupation. It is maintained that agriculture in Italy has not yet reached its full development, and that the level of rural life ought to be brought to the level of the industrial worker's life by better housing, higher wages, more road development and so forth. Most important, perhaps, of all, a really sustained effort should be made to banish illiteracy. The decade between 1921 and 1931 saw a distinct improvement, but even so over 40 per cent of the population was illiterate at that date in Sicily, Calabria and Lucania, while between 20 and 40 per cent was illiterate in Umbria, The Marches, Campania, Abruzzi, Sardinia and Apulia. Illiteracy is most frequent amongst the older people.

After what was said in a previous chapter<sup>2</sup> it will hardly come as a surprise if it is said here that the practice of the Corporative State and

<sup>1</sup> A frank financial statement was made on August 5th, 1943, by the Finance Minister in the Badoglio Cabinet.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter Nine.

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of the Fascist Party was woefully inferior to its theory. The establishment of the Corporative system led to the country having clamped upon it a second bureaucracy composed of officials who were not required to pass any tests or open competitions and who were frequently lacking in the requisite qualifications. Posts were allotted to those who could pull strings, and, what made the scandal even more flagrant, the salaries were notably higher than those paid to the regular State employees. The natural consequence was that important positions were entrusted to men possessing little or no knowledge of the interests which they were supposed to represent, so that one of the fundamental postulates of the Corporative system was *ipso facto* denied. The new bureaucracy, in other words, was built up on the spoils system and was recruited from men who had hitherto failed to find lucrative posts in the Fascist Party or who wished to improve their position or who expected a reward for political services rendered. A bureaucracy formed in this way naturally proved quite incompetent to administer the mass of regulations, and the consequence was that exasperated members of the public found that the simplest, quickest and in the long run the most advantageous thing to do was to bribe the officials. The *mancia* (tip) is a deep-rooted institution in Italy. It was, therefore, doubly understandable that bribes should be accepted by men conscious of owing their positions to graft and nepotism and not to hard work and suitability.

Nor was it only the officials who came in for increasingly bitter and outspoken criticism. The soundness and value of the system itself were openly challenged. The Milanese Professor De Maria demanded that, as soon as peace was restored, the economic system should be freed from the "strait-jacket of State Corporative control" which had been a chief cause of the decline in production. It was, he wrote, the large industrial enterprises that were the principal participants in the privileged monopolistic organizations, whereas it was still the middle-sized firms with less than 1,000 employees which were responsible for the largest part of the national production. In this criticism he had the support of Signor Bottai, at one time Minister of Corporations, who wrote in his *Critica Fascista* that the principal fault lay with the Fascist big-wigs who, especially since the war, had been manipulating the system so as to build up large trusts, thereby obliterating the small man and exploiting the workers. Moreover the workers were admitted not to have had their rightful say in the election of their representatives in the syndicates, the appointments being in practice imposed "from above"

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This arbitrary practice, it was confessed, had been a principal factor in creating the dislike and distrust felt by the workers for the Corporative and Syndical system. Signor Bottai has, in fact, been remarkably outspoken in his comments upon the disorganization and inefficiency of the Administration, and not many months ago he maintained that unless something was done to level the average of resources and to reduce the gap between great riches and great poverty a series of economic crises was inevitable. Five professors of economics at Milan and Turin Universities collaborated in the production of a book on post-war economic reconstruction which embodied some singularly frank criticism of Italian and German economic policy. Thus on the showing of the Italians themselves the vaunted Corporative system, partly owing to the incompetence of the officials and partly owing to its inherent defects, antagonized large sections both of employers and employees, and, by bringing in its wake a complicated and costly bureaucracy, placed exasperating obstacles in the way of healthy private initiative.

Infinitely more important, however, than the material achievements and failures of Fascism is the question how far the regime won intellectual, moral and spiritual victories, and how far such victories have been beneficial to the nation as a whole. Among the fundamental ideas of Fascism as set forth by Signor Mussolini in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* are many that are inspiring and salutary in themselves:

"To Fascism the world is not this material world which appears on the surface, in which man is an individual separated from all other men, standing by himself and subject to a natural law which instinctively impels him to lead a life of momentary and egoistic pleasure." "Fascism wishes a man to be active and to be absorbed in action with all his energies; it wishes him to have a manly consciousness of the difficulties that exist and to be ready to face them." "No action is to be divorced from the moral sense; nothing is to be in the world which is divested of the importance that belongs to it in respect of moral aims. Life, therefore, according to the Fascist conception, is serious, austere, religious; wholly balanced in a world sustained by the moral and responsible forces of the spirit. The Fascist despises the 'easy' life."

But these sentiments were embedded amidst others which robbed man of all his natural dignity by making him perforce into a mere cog in the machinery of the State, and in any case, as we have seen, Fascist theory and Fascist practice were two very different things. Fascism



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would have been an infinitely greater menace to the world than it has been if its doctrine had been applied in all its theoretical purity. Such, however, as it was, and great as were its imperfections, the doctrine of Fascism undoubtedly won its sincere and disinterested adherents. Only a genuine believer could have written a "spiritual testament" such as the following which was left by a Black Shirt killed in action:

"I accept", he wrote, "the war voluntarily as an act of faith and as the completion of my personality. I do not fear the war, and the few moments of hesitation which preceded my decision were due solely to my deep love for my family. This war has been a material and historic necessity for Italy and for the Revolution. If a higher social justice is to be attained it is necessary to create the economic premises of the new organization. If we are to be an Empire we cannot tolerate an inferior and servile position in the living space which is essential to us for our construction, life and colonization. Seeing the war from this point of view, I could not refrain from taking a material part in it. I was born and have lived with Fascism. I belonged to the movement when I was thirteen years old and a few months later I was attacked for the first time and severely shaken by a group of students and teachers from the industrial school where I studied. My whole family became Fascists from that day. I have worked unceasingly in the ranks of the Party and in the forward trenches of Syndicalism both at home and abroad for the wider divulgation of Mussolini's truth. I am thus a son of the Revolution and must therefore offer my services in this moment of glory and sacrifice. I believe in the Duce, in his generous faith, in his divine mission, and in his limitless and unrestricted genius. The goals which he has shown to the Italian people and the whole of mankind cannot fail, but they demand absolute fidelity to the cause and determination to fight against all the inevitable resistances. Aware of all this, I have chosen my action station and will see to it that I am worthy. I am absolutely calm and certain of victory. If I should be killed in Russia I leave this testament of my faith to my wife, children and father. I have nothing else to leave."

The volume of criticisms of the regime which mounted so steadily during 1942 and 1943 must also be taken to prove the existence of a considerable body of Fascists who were genuine supporters of Fascism as it had started out to be and who were disgusted at its degenerate developments and practice.

No reasonable objection could have been taken to Signor Mussolini's encouragement of patriotism; to his attempts to cure Italians of a deep-

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seated inferiority complex bred of hearing themselves continually referred to as "Dagoes", "Wops", "Macaronis" and "Ice-creamers"; to his fostering of sport, and to his desire to wean his countrymen from their excessive Regionalism and to make them realize that the inhabitants of Palermo or Taranto, of Naples or Turin are all alike citizens of a United Italy. But all these aims underwent distortion. Patriotism degenerated with the fanatics into rabid Nationalism and Jingoism. The inferiority complex only too often was replaced by intolerable arrogance. Even sport lost its spontaneity and was methodically cultivated to the greater glory of Fascism.

In his earlier days Signor Mussolini once said,

"Imagine an Italy in which 36 millions should all think the same, as though their brains were made in an identical mould, and you would have a madhouse, or, rather, a kingdom of utter boredom or imbecility."

But what seemed intolerable to the youthful Mussolini in a nation of 36 millions was exactly what the Mussolini of later days sought to inflict upon a nation of 46 millions. If he failed to gain a totalitarian victory he succeeded so far that he practically extinguished any exterior manifestation of independence or originality and submerged the intellectual and spiritual life of his country under a sea of insincerity and hypocrisy. Signor Mussolini once compared the Press to an orchestra, the members of which played their music under him as conductor. The simile is apt. The more important scores were handed to the first violins, such as Signor Gayda, and minor parts were given to less well known journalists, but the Press as a whole formed a well-drilled band. The same theme was to be found in all the newspapers on any given day with little or no variations and was often expounded in identical language obviously written out at the dictation of an official in the Propaganda Department. No journalist might ply his trade unless he was inscribed on the professional roll, and to qualify for inscription he must be of approved moral and political standing. University professors were even more strictly circumscribed by an oath which ran:

"I swear to be loyal to the King, to his royal successors and the Fascist regime, to observe loyally the *Statuto* (Constitution) and the other laws of the State, to exercise the office of teacher and fulfil all the academic duties with the purpose of forming citizens, industrious, honest and devoted to the Fatherland and the Fascist regime. I swear

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that I do not and will not belong to associations or parties the activity of which is not in harmony with the duties of my office."

Thus hamstrung, the professors naturally only taught in accordance with the approved text-books and ideas, and their pupils in turn reproduced the same hackneyed phrases and theories in their theses. Even the arts such as architecture tended to follow one monotonous form. For several years the most approved architect was Signor Piacentini. He and his school were responsible for the new buildings of Rome University and many other public buildings. It would be difficult to say whether Rome has suffered more from the "austere", shapeless masses of the Piacentini style or the Vatican City from the more florid but equally detestable monstrosities erected under Pius XI. For one thing, at any rate, the world may be thankful. Signor Mussolini did not sanction the plan for the construction of an enormous headquarters of the Fascist Party mid-way along the Via dell' Impero where it would have had to stand in view of the Column of Trajan, the Campidoglio and the Roman Forum. Music has come off better than most of the arts, but the modern paintings are, for the most part, so hideous and so utterly lacking in draughtsmanship that they must be seen to be believed. Parliamentary life and debate in recent years existed only in name. The Parliament became nothing but a registration office, utilized to give full legal effect to decrees. Except on very special occasions the proceedings aroused no public interest. Herein the public showed its good sense, because for all practical purposes the two Houses might just as well have been abolished. Well might Professor Salvemini write that

"Italy is the only country whose Government has organized a spectacular, world-wide propaganda campaign to prove that its people was so backward as to be incapable of self-government, and that to educate it there were necessary the Fascist bludgeon and castor oil. Italy is the only country in the world whose Government has striven intensively to erect the false glory of a single man on the unmerited discredit of an entire people."

The worst injury of all done to the Italian people has been the fostering of insincerity and hypocrisy. Within forty-eight hours of my first arrival in Rome as a newspaper correspondent I found myself seated at dinner next to a certain Count and Senator who, I observed, was wearing the Party badge in days when the *tessera* was not so very commonly worn in Society. He asked me what I thought of Fascism. I replied that as I had only been two days in Rome I was not qualified

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to express an opinion. What were his views? To my surprise he answered that the system was thoroughly harmful because it compelled many people to adhere to it insincerely out of self-interest, and that this hypocrisy was especially deplorable in Italy where only too many persons prided themselves on outwitting their neighbours and where the first words ever taught to a child were a lie. I was just assuming that he was a violent anti-clerical and perhaps even a Protestant when he went on, "What happens to the average child after it is born? As soon as the first ministrations have been performed for it and its mother it is given back to her, and she, pointing to a male figure standing at the foot of the bed, says to the infant, 'Babbo' (Daddy)." This cynical observation was not without truth. The recent wholesale purges of the Fascist Party were due to the realization that very many thousands of its members were lukewarm adherents, if indeed they were even that. When not long after the Conciliation a first-class quarrel developed<sup>1</sup> between Church and State over Catholic Action, Pius XI issued his famous Encyclical *Non Abbiamo Bisogno* in the course of which he attacked the Fascist oath and wrote:

"Realizing the numerous difficulties of the present hour, and being aware that membership of the Party and the oath are for countless people a necessary condition of their career, daily bread, and even their life itself, We have tried to find a way which would restore tranquillity to these consciences, reducing to a minimum the external difficulties of the situation. It appears to Us that such a means for those who have already obtained the membership card would be for them to make for themselves before God, in their own consciences, a reservation such as 'Saving the laws of God and of the Church', or 'In accordance with the duties of a good Christian', with the firm purpose of declaring also openly such a reservation if such a need arose. We should wish that Our prayer may move those heads of the Party who decide its policy and issue the orders. It is the prayer of a Father who is jealous for the consciences of so many of his children. Let the reservation above mentioned be included in the formula of the oath. Better still, let the oath be dropped, since an oath is an act of religion and is out of place on the membership card of a political party."

This Papal protest led to a modification in the oath, but from that time onwards the Fascist authorities can never have felt so sure of their ground and must have feared that casuistry was lurking behind the taking of the oath.

<sup>1</sup> In 1931.

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An article published in May 1943 in Signor Bottai's *Critica Fascista* gave a very penetrating diagnosis of Italian psychology. It stated:

"Italy is not an easy country to govern. She has been united for only a few decades, but her inhabitants have a political conscience which, at times, is hypersensitive and morbid: she is a poor country, but her inhabitants allow no one to govern them as if they were common, shabby beggars without the slightest dignity. She is a country where there are still belts of scarcely cultivated land and where certain so-called educated classes read little, but the inhabitants do not admit they are governed by uncultured people: a country where the people 'know how to shift for themselves', where all are sly and cunning and where any peasant knows how to employ low casuistry for his own ends, yet, nevertheless, the inhabitants pretend to be governed by honest men. She is a country where all are improvisers and where anyone can be a demon at rhetorics, or apparently so, but all are ultra-sharp at detecting a sham: at 'debunking' show and ostentation with irony: and at taking a rise out of conceited people.

"She is a country that loves pirates, fine uniforms and public spectacles, but, having admired them, demands the substance. The Italians are a people of pastoral mind and good-natured, but they also know what an authentic warrior or a hero is. This people has produced the unnamed sorrowing multitudes of emigrants and also a Christopher Columbus. They have produced manual labourers, but also many factory hands classed among the world's best, as well as Lombard and Piedmont manufacturers.

"They are a people who gives way to the gentlest sentimentalism or to the savagery of Empoli in 1921: a people who indulges in *laissez-aller* and *'tira a campare'* (rubs along whate'er betide). But let them be angered beyond measure and they react either with the inertia of passive resistance, or with the wild fury of a riot. They love to live far from political activities, but want to judge the slightest act of their political leaders. Many centuries of luckless history of disrupting strife that has drained away existing wealth and prevented the accumulation of new wealth have left them with a mature civilization, but the rottenness of 'culturism', subtleties and spiritual finesse, and with defects and grave evils, and terribly backward in just those things which count in the face of contemporary Europe."

The boldness and acuteness of this analysis are a tribute to Signor Bottai's courage. There are, however, one or two other characteristics, mention of which will help to complete the picture. In the first place

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the highly-developed critical faculty of the Italian gives to many foreign observers an exaggerated idea of his discontent. The Italian is no whit behind the Irishman in his propensity for being "agin the Government". This propensity is summed up in the well-known saying, "*Piove, Governo ladro*" ("It is raining, the robber Government"), and in the more modern quip that the favourite street in Rome under Fascism was the *Via del Governo Vecchio* (Street of the Old Government). But such jibes and grumbling are not to be taken too seriously, and have even been tolerated up to a certain point by the Fascist regime which saw in them a safety-valve for the letting off of steam. A second saving grace has been the intense individualism of the Italian. It is quite true that Italians with their exuberant temperament are apt to fall victims to mass excitement and to go temporarily berserk. But the enthusiasm often dies away as quickly as it is aroused and the critical faculty reasserts itself. The Italian likes to add his individual touch to whatever he is making, just as he liked to give his own interpretation to Fascism. If the State professors were debarred from so doing in their teaching they could not be prevented from forming their own private opinions. The workman was freer. There are a vast number of craftsmen in Italy who conduct their businesses alone or with only a few assistants, and their distinctive, individual products are among the most appreciated of any in the world. Discipline, moreover, is, as a general rule, apt to be lax and administration easy-going in Italy, where nothing is proverbially more popular than a *combinazione*. Lamentable, therefore, as hypocrisy must be to the stern moralist, there is good reason to hope that the sturdy individualism and critical faculty of the people may prove to have survived the deadening discipline of Fascism to a greater degree than may have appeared and that no great effort will be required for the elimination of the Fascist virus.

## *Chapter Twelve*

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TEMPTING as political prophecy is, there is no intention here of dogmatizing upon the future of Italy. The available data are quite insufficient. History shows many instances where a nation defeated in war takes many years and undergoes many changes before it finally settles down. This may well happen in Italy. Even had Signor Mussolini's dictatorship ended in some normal way, e.g. by his voluntary resignation or a natural death, the odds are that his disappearance would have been followed by a period of unrest, if not of chaos. Those Fascists who were straining hardest at the leash were prepared up to the last moment not to question Signor Mussolini's leadership. But as between themselves his lieutenants were full of jealous rivalry, and there would almost certainly have been a fight for the succession. Now that the end of his dictatorship was forced upon him and the Fascist regime toppled over with him, the chances of Italy finding at once her new and permanent form are even less. For over twenty years Signor Mussolini deprived the masses of his people from taking any part or interest in politics. They were there simply to "believe, obey, fight". Any attempts to exercise what in democratic countries are regarded as the elementary rights of a citizen were sternly discouraged or punished. More than two decades of political absenteeism are bound to produce their effects, and these effects will inevitably come into prominence as soon as the 45 millions of Italians living inside Italy will have come into intimate contact with those other Italians who, for one reason or another, have spent many years abroad and have absorbed an entirely different set of ideas. While, then, anything approaching detailed prophecy as to Italy's future is impossible, it may be useful here to recall certain fundamental statements of Allied policy towards Italy; to compare various programmes drawn up by Fascist and anti-Fascist Italians within and outside Italy; and, after the ground has thus been cleared to some extent, to consider a few broad principles upon which the rebuilding of a new and free Italy will presumably have to be based.

The most fundamental statement of Allied policy may be found in the Atlantic Charter. The terms of this Charter have been so widely

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advertised that it is unnecessary to set them out here. The point of immediate interest is Article III under which Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt, as representing their respective countries, declared that "they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of Government under which they will live". But this freedom of choice was made subject to one vitally important condition. Article VI of the Charter opens with the words "after the final destruction of Nazi tyranny". The Charter does not specifically allude to the Fascist tyranny. But that the Nazi tyranny was intended to include also the Fascist tyranny was at once understood in Rome and Berlin, and the correctness of this interpretation was borne out by many public statements made by the spokesmen of the United Nations. The United Nations never wavered in their proclaimed determination to bring Fascism down to the dust. Eight months before the proclamation of the Atlantic Charter Mr. Churchill broadcast <sup>1</sup> an appeal to the Italian nation as a whole over the head of Signor Mussolini. It was upon this occasion that Mr. Churchill first saddled Signor Mussolini with the sole responsibility for having dragged his country into war with us and for having forfeited the sympathy and intimacy of the United States of America. Since that date Mr. Churchill has consistently and repeatedly differentiated between the mass of the Italian people and Signor Mussolini and his Fascist military clique. The same is true of Mr. Eden and of other responsible British spokesmen. President Roosevelt has been equally emphatic in distinguishing between the Italian nation and Signor Mussolini, whom, together with "his personal Fascist regime", he accused of acting in the name of Italy but of not actually representing the Italian people, "who are on the whole, by and large, a people devoted to peace".<sup>2</sup> When, he added, the German domination of Italy was ended and the Fascist regime was thrown out, all the United Nations could, he felt sure, "assure the Italian people of their freedom to choose the non-Fascist, non-Nazi kind of Government that they wish to establish". Declarations to the same effect have been made by Marshal Stalin and by the Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. It was, therefore, made abundantly clear to the Italian nation from the outset that the Allies would not tolerate the survival of Signor Mussolini and of his Fascist confederates.

But the spokesmen of the United Nations have not yet made equally clear their intentions regarding Italian territory, except in so far as

<sup>1</sup> On December 23rd, 1940.

<sup>2</sup> At a Press Conference in Washington on June 4th, 1943.



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Article II of the Atlantic Charter expressed the "desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned". Ethiopia has been triumphantly restored to the sway of its Emperor, Haile Selassie. An assurance was given by Mr. Eden to the Senussi of Cyrenaica that they would not again come under Italian rule. Mr. Eden has also declared in answer to a question in the House of Commons that the Allied Governments do not intend to restore to Italy all her former possessions in North Africa. Otherwise no commitments have as yet been openly and definitely assumed. This was only elementary prudence, and had we acted in the opposite way we should certainly have been taunted by the Axis with cutting up the bear's carcase before the bear had been killed. But the absence of any authorized pronouncements did not prevent various speculative proposals being put forward in the Allied Press, and Italian propagandists seized upon the occasion to string together all the most unfavourable suggestions and then to paint a lurid picture of the appalling fate awaiting a defeated Italy. On July 12th, 1943, when the plight of Italy was already recognized to be desperate and when impassioned appeals were being made to the nation to rally in defence of the Fatherland, the official *Stefani* newsagency issued the following statement:

"The real intentions of the Anglo-Americans as regards Italy are becoming more evident every day. The Duce's warning that, if Italy were to capitulate, the enemy would leave her only her eyes to weep with, is confirmed every day by more or less authorized statements in the Anglo-Saxon press which, drunk with optimism, believes that the moment has come to drop the mask.

"In this connexion it is interesting to enumerate the 12 points and conditions which, it is said, are to be imposed upon Italy if she loses the war. These points have already been revealed by official Anglo-Saxon spokesmen, and the British and American press now takes it upon itself to present them to the Italian people like a bill which must be honoured with the shortest possible delay. The points are as follows:

- "(1) The Fleet and the Air Force to be handed over.
- "(2) The metal, iron, and engineering industries to be abolished.
- "(3) The strength of the Army to be reduced, only what is strictly necessary to maintain internal order to be retained.
- "(4) Pantelleria, Tobruk, La Maddalena, and other strategic bases to be ceded to Britain.
- "(5) Istria and the naval bases of Pola and Trieste to be handed to

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Yugoslavia, the frontier thus being withdrawn to the Isonzo.

"(6) Possessions in the Ionian and the Aegean Sea to be ceded to Greece.

"(7) The colonial empire, including Libya, to be given up.

"(8) Italy to give up her rank as a Great Power.

"(9) Military occupation of Italian territory for an indefinite period.

"(10) The cultivation of cereals to be abandoned and agricultural production to be confined to vegetables only.

"(11) Numerous universities to be closed.

"(12) Classical education to be abolished, to prevent Youth from being inspired by the greatness of Rome, only technical schools being left.

"This enumeration, which affects all institutions, all classes, and all activities of the Italian people, who are to be humiliated and thrown into slavery, shows the extent of the hatred which the Anglo-Saxons feel towards the Italian race, and the base intentions which they entertain regarding the nation whose sole wrong it was to want to occupy in the world a place worthy of its sacrifices and of its qualities."

Some of these points were so manifestly idiotic that nobody could have been deceived. Their publication was, however, no bad thing for the Allies, as it showed them what the Italians were being taught to expect, and therefore it may well prove useful when the real terms come to be presented.

Fascist propaganda has been noticeably inconsistent and mercurial. The defeats of the winter 1940-41 drew from Signor Ansaldo his famous broadcast "Woe, Woe!"<sup>1</sup> In the summer of 1942 Signor Gayda was opening his mouth so wide that he was ready to swallow an enormous chunk of the African continent.<sup>2</sup> This was going far beyond anything he had previously said. Early in 1940 Signor Gayda had spoken to me strongly but vaguely about the iniquity of Italy remaining bottled up in the Mediterranean; he had practically admitted that saturation point was being reached in Libya and that Abyssinia was proving a disappointment; but he had suggested that Italian eyes were principally fixed upon Tunisia. He had also put forward to me the plea that Italy should be encouraged to keep up her high birth-rate on the score that, if the European races did not multiply, we should soon be at the mercy of the black and yellow peoples, and it was evident that he saw in Africa the sphere of Italian expansion. He never, however,

<sup>1</sup> Chapter Nine.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter Eight.

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indicated that Italian appetites were so insatiable as they afterwards became despite Signor Mussolini's statement that with the conquest of Abyssinia Italy was a "satisfied" nation. But during 1943 the Italian appetite grew steadily smaller. After the meeting between Signor Mussolini and Herr Hitler, which lasted from April 7th to April 10th, the Italians suddenly developed a spirit of sympathy for the European occupied countries and virtually declared that they had reproached the Germans with their foolish and brutal treatment of the enslaved peoples. Signor Gayda published a programme of a New Order based upon six fundamental points:—(i) Recognition of the right of all European States, great and small, to independence, liberty, and full sovereignty; (ii) Permanent collaboration between the European peoples on the basis of their common interests and within the framework of Europe's mission of civilization and of the recognized value of European solidarity to each and all; (iii) A fair redistribution of raw materials and of the world's goods among civilized peoples in proportion to their needs for existence and work; (iv) The free economic development of each nation within the framework of solidarity of interests; (v) Freedom of the seas and of trade for all nations; and (vi) Justice and social peace within each State, coupled with protection of the working classes and a shortening of the distance between the social classes as realized in Italy and Germany. This programme obviously owed a great deal both to the programmes successively put forward by the Pope<sup>1</sup> and to the Atlantic Charter, and Signor Gayda was reduced to appending to each of his points a comment expressing disbelief in the sincerity of the Anglo-American proposals or pointing to alleged examples of Anglo-American imperialism and disregard of the rights of others. Signor Gayda subsequently even went so far as to pretend that Italy was compelled to enter the war because she was blockaded by Great Britain and France; that she had no desire for revenge; that she did not wish to impose her will or her system of government on other peoples, or (if he is correctly reported) to modify in any way the map of Europe or of Africa. Italy, now said the plaintive Signor Gayda, only asked for justice and the respect of national rights, both for herself and other peoples. She asked for the fulfilment of her national unity, security, freedom on the seas and enough colonial living space to provide the inhabitants of her over-populated territory with work and a livelihood. How these ambitions were to be satisfied without any alterations to the map Signor Gayda did not explain.

<sup>1</sup> Chapter Ten.

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But while Fascists continued up to the last to be occupied mainly with expounding their external war aims and even Senator Gentile was dug out of his retirement to declare that "Only the Corporative system could bring salvation", "It was impossible to go back", "Fascism was to be looked on as the development of Italy, that Italy who was destined to fulfil her mission in the world", the principal anti-Fascist underground movements in Italy which had agreed to sink their differences, temporarily at least, were for the most part concerned with internal reconstruction. A programme, issued in the name of the Action Party, demanded (i) the establishment of a republican regime in view of the "prolonged abdication" of the Monarchy and its co-responsibility with Fascism for the ruin of the country; (ii) full protection of civil and political freedom; (iii) careful and permanent control through the representative organs of the Executive, which should enjoy sufficient authority and stability to ensure continuity, efficiency and rapidity of action and to prevent a return to that state of permanent crisis which was so fatal to parliamentary regimes; (iv) a guarantee of complete independence for the Judiciary; (v) the reorganization on a representative system of Communal and Provincial bodies, and the development of the economic, social and cultural needs of the different regions; (vi) the nationalization of the large financial, industrial and insurance trusts, and their management in accordance with their own character and the public needs; (vii) the restoration of liberty of economic enterprise to the smaller undertakings, which, while fitting into the national economy, were to be freed from the bonds of bureaucracy; (viii) a radical agrarian reform which, due regard being paid to geographical, economic and social variations, should allow more labourers to enjoy ownership of the land either (a) individually, through the breaking-up of large estates or gradual alteration in the terms of tenure, or (b) collectively, through collective management of large farms existing or to be created under due legal regulations. The cooperative system to be fostered in every possible way with the ulterior object of (a) raising the standard of the labourer's fitness for taking a share in political and social life, and further, through international coordination of economic activity and modern technical improvements, of (b) allowing the resumption of that specialized and more profitable economy which had been checked and upset by the policy of autarky; (ix) the assignment to the workers' syndicates, after the restitution of those liberties which derived from the right of association, of an essential share in the process of production. The workers to share in the profits;

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(x) full liberty of creed and cult. Problems relating to the separation of the civil from the religious power to be solved with strict respect for the rights of conscience and freedom of the Church within the province of its spiritual functions; (xi) in the international field, so far as the situation existing *de facto* at the end of the war should allow, the utmost support for the formation of a single European conscience as being indispensable to the realization of a European federation of free democratic countries within the framework of a vaster, world-wide collaboration. In the meantime it was of immediate urgency that there should be (a) close and continuous cooperation with all the democracies; (b) revision of international relations and values so that the principle of absolute sovereignty might be renounced and all problems of a merely territorial nature might be repudiated; (c) a juridical community of States, endowed with the means of establishing and operating a regime of collective security, of international protection of minorities and of a iuster and progressive application of the system of colonial mandates; (xii) the conclusion of a peace such as would permit and ensure a general economic reorganization according to the principles of the division of labour, of the free transfer of the forces of production and goods, and of free access to the sources of raw materials.

That this programme will not win universal acceptance goes without saying. To take one obvious example. The demand for the abolition of the Monarchy will provoke strong reactions among those Italians who regard it, irrespective of the actual wearer of the crown, as the symbol of the national unity, a last bulwark against dictatorships. Constitutionally unconstitutional or unconstitutionally constitutional as King Victor Emmanuel was between October 28th, 1922, and July 25th, 1943, he nevertheless retained powers which, in theory if not in fact, would have enabled him at any given moment to dismiss Signor Mussolini from power. Laws and decrees were issued in the King's name. The Royal March took precedence on all national occasions over the Fascist hymns. The wearers of the Collar of the *Annunziata*, which made them the King's "cousins", were immune from the outrages of Fascist thugs. Even such an avowed opponent of the Fascist regime as Signor Benedetto Croce found in his capacity as a Senator of the Realm freedom to go his own way. The reference in the King's proclamation of July 25th to those institutions which always helped Italy to rise shows that he wished to remind his people of the part which the House of Savoy had played in the *Risorgimento* in company with such stout Republicans as Mazzini and Garibaldi. And if many

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individual Italians would rather acknowledge the leadership of a constitutional monarch than that of a republican president there is no doubt upon which side the sympathies of the Vatican lie. Obedience to the legally constituted authorities of the State may be the guiding rule of Vatican policy, but the Vatican has its preferences and it is well aware that the more a State moves towards the Left the more likely is it to become anti-clerical. For in Latin countries Republics have tended, since the French Revolution, either towards an atheistic anti-clericalism, which becomes the basis of the State and makes for a permanent and irreconcilable division between vital elements of the population, or else towards a clerical authoritarianism which, when it is not brutally repressive, offers little in the way of what we call freedom. Moreover, as "democratic" Republics have to be built up on a mass appeal, the result must necessarily be a deadly conflict between the embattled forces of Catholicism on the one hand and the Leftist or Marxist forces on the other. A well-established and liberal Monarchy does not require to make such appeals to the masses, is a bulwark against Communism, and, even though it naturally refuses to be overshadowed by the Church, provides the essential element of continuity.

The 59 years of voluntary imprisonment in the Vatican which the Papacy enjoined upon itself were wiped off the slate when Pius XII went to visit the King in the Quirinal Palace in 1939. Ruling Sovereigns form a little, highly exclusive Trade Union of their own. The address which the Pope delivered to 20,000 or more Italian workmen on Whitsunday, 1943, was largely a warning against trust being put in the specious promises of demagogues and against the dangers and disillusionments of social revolutions. The reference, moreover, under item X of the programme of the Action Party to the position of the Church in a republican regime may, perhaps, indicate the possibility of an attempt being made to bring up the whole question of the Lateran Agreements of 1929. Pius XI always maintained that the political Treaty, the financial Convention and the Concordat were interdependent, whereas the Fascist Government declared that Italy was free to denounce the Concordat without invalidating the Treaty. As the intimate collaborator and disciple of his predecessor Pius XII would probably try to take the same line, but it is hard to believe that a man of his character would in the last resort insist. It is, therefore, not to be excluded that a republican regime might hark back again to Cavour's well-known formula of "A free Church in a free State". The Concordat, after all, has not always been strictly observed by the Fascist

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Government, and it is an instrument dealing merely with the position of the Church in the Italian State.

The general principles of Vatican policy were clearly delineated in the utterances of the Pope quoted in a preceding chapter.<sup>1</sup> Their repetition is unnecessary. It is, however, interesting to see how the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards the outcome of the war was being interpreted by the correspondent of the German newsagency *Transocean* on July 14th, 1943; at a moment, that is to say, when Italy was already wallowing deep in the mire and when President Roosevelt had sought to allay the Pope's nervousness over the prospect of an Allied invasion of the mainland by promising that all possible regard would be paid to the Vatican City and to the Papal domains in Italy.

"In Vatican circles", he reported, "the Anglo-U.S. plan to conquer Italy and carry out a political revolution there has caused great anxiety which is in no way lessened by Roosevelt's guarantees. The Vatican fears that if this plan were realized, it would endanger the existence and the freedom of action of the Catholic Church and of its head. The institution of the Holy See has for centuries been so thoroughly Italianized that its leading men are mainly recruited from the Italian people and more closely linked with the Italian people's prosperity and fate than with those of any other nation. For more than four centuries all Popes have been Italians. That is why the Catholic Church and Fascism have always, in spite of doctrinal differences, managed to get on with each other. The last Papal speech on June 13th, addressed to 20,000 Italian workers, showed to what extent the former *modus vivendi* between Church and Fascism has developed into active cooperation to combat the anti-Catholic, anti-Christian and Bolshevik danger. Shrewd observers, commenting on this development, state that a kind of 'mutual assurance' of the two forces has emerged. Well-informed Vatican circles therefore regard the breaking-up of Italy and of Fascism as dangerous for the Catholic Church because: (1) In the case of conquest, Italy will, for the first time in her history, be at the mercy of Protestant Powers, a fact regarded as even more dangerous for the Church than the Reformation, which never brought Protestant influence right up to the walls of the Papal State. They think this Anglo-U.S. influence would have to be reckoned with, as no prominent Italians, in Italy or abroad, would be ready to collaborate with Britain and the U.S.A. (2) The military defeat of Italy, with all its material and moral consequences, would lead to the disorganization of the nation from which the Church for centuries has drawn its most vital strength. (3) The

<sup>1</sup> Chapter Ten.

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defeat of Italy would bring nearer the Bolshevization of Europe. Vatican circles do not believe the position of Catholicism in South America would ever be a substitute for its European basis. The misunderstanding of the Curia's attitude to these questions—clearly revealed in Roosevelt's letter to the Pope—has all the more surprised the Vatican as Roosevelt's special envoy, Myron Taylor, was expressly told in the Vatican in September 1942 of the relations between the Holy See and Fascism."

This report must, of course, be taken with a grain of salt as coming from such a tendentious source, but it is not to be dismissed offhand. That the Pope, with his long diplomatic training, will expect to play a part in the post-war reconstruction not only of Italy but of the world is evident from his above-quoted addresses. The demand that the Church be allowed to fulfil, unhampered, her lofty mission in the world was the main argument of some remarkable articles contributed by Professor Gonella to the *Osservatore Romano* in 1942; and from this starting point the right of the Church to participate in the political and public life of the nation was definitely claimed on the ground that religion is not only the teaching of the life of the peoples but also a political and social science, the purpose of which is to save souls and to help the nations in accordance with a uniform system based on a uniform idea, which should guide the individual, the family and the nation. Such a claim, one may be certain, did not pass unobserved by those who have remarked that in Italy none of the higher prelates of the Church dissociated themselves from Fascism by protests of the character made by certain high ecclesiastics in Nazi Germany, and who are well aware that, as the revolt against Fascism was gradually coming to a head, an often-suggested instrument of its overthrow was thought to reside in an association of the House of Savoy with the Papacy, the large land-owners and the powerful leaders of finance and industry.

It is evident from the programme of the Action Party summarized above that such an alliance would provoke opposition.<sup>1</sup> The heresy hunt would not be confined by these Republicans and anti-Fascists to the Royal Family or to the more notorious Fascist extremists, but would be extended to many other persons whose political conduct under Fascism has been, to say the least of it, equivocal. As has been suggested earlier,<sup>2</sup> Mr. Churchill did not expect his words casting the sole responsibility for Italian policy upon Signor Mussolini to be taken

<sup>1</sup> This opposition, in fact, soon manifested itself against the Badoglio Cabinet.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Six.



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absolutely literally. Both he and President Roosevelt associated with Signor Mussolini his more intimate collaborators. There is *prima facie* a good deal to be said for the more reasonable view that the overthrow of the Fascist regime

“does not mean that every Italian whose name has been inscribed on the roll of the Party is for ever debarred from public life. Prudence is one of the cardinal virtues as well as courage, and there are many degrees of subscription to Fascist doctrines. But the Fascist regime—the system and the *gerarchia*—must go if Italy is to restore lasting friendship with England.”<sup>1</sup>

That Fascists can be graded is indisputable. That many inscribed Fascists only paid lip-service to Fascism for the sake of their careers and bread and butter was cast in the teeth of the regime by sturdy, blunt old Pius XI.<sup>2</sup> But for the more intransigent anti-Fascists such distinctions are strongly suspect, if not anathema. The solution of Italy's problem, Signor Paolo Treves has written,<sup>3</sup> must be as radical as that of Germany's. Half-measures, compromises, all the skilful manoeuvres beloved by diplomats are useless here, fail to meet the case. Signor Treves does not say in so many words that nobody who has ever sported the *tessera* is to participate in the public life of the new Italy; but he is very emphatic in repudiating the notion that there can be a nice quiet form of Fascism suitable for Italians. The future of Italy, he observes, “certainly does not lie in exchanging Mussolini for some Grandi or Volpi or De Vecchi, but in accustoming ourselves to thinking along quite different lines”.

Disappointment with Marshal Badoglio for not having initiated his Premiership by an immediate acceptance of the Allied demand for unconditional surrender quickly gave rise to accusations of his being a crypto-Fascist. It is perfectly true that he served the Fascist Government in many capacities and that he accepted from them the highest honours. He consented to go as Italian Ambassador to Brazil. He consented to become Governor-General of Libya. He was quite ready to undertake the conquest of Abyssinia when the Quadrumvir Marshal (then General) De Bono had exposed his incompetence. He accepted the title of Duke of Addis Ababa after his rapid and triumphant entry into that capital had been accelerated by the use of mustard gas. He took charge for a week or two of the ignominious campaign against Greece into which Signor Mussolini's treacherous aggression had

<sup>1</sup> *The Remaking of Italy*, by Pentad. Penguin Special, 1941.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter Eleven.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*

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plunged his country. It is also quite true that by upbringing, by his career as a soldier, by temperament, by his friendship with the King, Pietro Badoglio was a man of the Right and had scant sympathy with the political views of the majority of the most prominent and the most active anti-Fascists. But it is unjust to assume that anti-Fascism can flourish solely among partisans of the Left wing in politics. If Marshal Badoglio, so far as he was concerned at all with politics, has been a Conservative and a Monarchist, he has been first and foremost a soldier, a strong and conscientious patriot, fully convinced—and this was one thing that made him opposed to Fascism—that the fighting services must hold aloof from, and be independent of, party politics. His loyalty was to his King and country. If his King forbade him to disperse the Fascist rabble marching upon Rome by firing a few bursts from a machine-gun he did not fire. If it was his patriotic duty to conduct the Abyssinian campaign on a scientifically military plan he conducted it with competent strategy. If he withdrew from the humiliating campaign against Greece it was probably because he had disapproved of the expedition as a dangerous dissipation of Italy's strength in view of the coming struggle with Great Britain in North Africa, wished to build up Italy's stocks, and would have preferred to patch up some arrangement with Greece rather than owe a Pyrrhic victory to the contemptuous intervention of the Germans. Scathing as were the terms of his rejoinder to the attacks of the "lawyer Farinacci",<sup>1</sup> it was only his patriotism and his "strong desire to conform to an august decree" that prevented him from scarifying still further his enemy. For years Marshal Badoglio's was practically the only name mentioned when discussion turned, inside and outside Italy, upon a possible alternative leader to Signor Mussolini. His character must have been known to his countrymen, and it cannot in justice be said that he has belied his fundamental anti-Fascism.<sup>2</sup> It will not, it is quite clear, be easy always to separate the goats from the sheep. There should, presumably, be no great difficulty in cutting the claws of those

<sup>1</sup> Chapter Seven.

<sup>2</sup> Much of the criticism so hastily made against him during the first weeks of his Premiership was afterwards shown to be unjustified. His proclaimed intention to carry on the war was not, in fact, much more than a formality, since he was already convinced that Italy was beaten and that it would be useless to continue the struggle. Moreover it is understood that at the time of the capitulation he tried to strengthen his Cabinet by including members of the anti-Fascist Parties, but that the question of the Monarchy proved a

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powerful industrialists and financiers who backed Fascism from the outset for their own selfish interests, and who, though in many cases they disliked the war, yet made money out of it, and who only towards the end took to airing their anti-Fascist views with vigour. But it will be harder to size up the true sentiments of the smaller fry and to know exactly how far the wearing of the Party badge was or was not imposed solely by the necessity of gaining a livelihood at all as distinct from a comfortable livelihood. It was a common jest that the initials P.N.F. on the *tessera* were interpreted by many of its wearers to mean not *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (Fascist National Party) but *Per Necessità Familiare* (For Family Necessities). Many genuine enough Fascists must have lost no time in trying to escape through this loophole. The third cock-crow will have followed, upon many impassioned abjurations of Fascist faith.

Finally, to take one more example, it can be foreseen that the international position of Italy, as adumbrated under point XI of the Action Party's programme, is not going to pass unchallenged. That programme is too vaguely worded to enable one to judge precisely what territorial adjustments are in the minds of its authors. If the many conversations I have had during the war with Italians living in this country are any criterion, and from what one hears and reads of the views of Italo-Americans and Italians exiled in the United States of America, the territorial clauses of the Italian Peace are going to give rise to acrimonious disputes and a tremendous lobbying campaign. The Italian vote is, of course, no negligible factor in American politics and it is already being mobilized. Although the line of reasoning of the pro-Fascist and anti-Fascist elements has been wholly opposed, yet many of both sides are at one in advancing strongly-backed arguments not only for Italy having her overseas possessions restored to her but also for her obtaining several of the claims put forward by the Fascist regime. The sponge, it seems, is to be passed over the Fascist record of treachery, aggression and treaty-breaking! The loss of the war, the winning of which brought so much misery and suffering into Allied homes, is to be brushed aside as an unimportant episode! Nobody wants to repeat the acknowledged errors of "Versailles"; but some of these Italian pretensions are so impertinent and so wholly divorced

stumbling-block. It was, doubtless, with this incident in mind that Mr. Churchill expressed in Parliament on September 21st the view that all Italians should collaborate now to drive out the Germans, without prejudice to their right ultimately to choose whatever form of Government they may wish.

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from all sense of realities that one is left gasping at the extent to which Fascist arrogance has coloured the mentality even of Italians living far away from the Fatherland.

But the true problem of Italy's political reconstruction as a whole will probably not be solved for many years. Italy will need a long period of convalescence before she expels all the Fascist poison from her system and recuperates from the shock of an ignominious defeat. It is useless to expect too much of her too quickly. A correspondence published in *The Times* at the beginning of 1942 revealed what different views were held by men such as Professor G. M. Trevelyan, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, Professor Gilbert Murray, Mr. Wickham Steed and others upon the complicity of the Italian nation in the crimes of Signor Mussolini and upon their "moral sense". If such a divergence is possible in this country amongst such eminent experts, the task of re-educating the Italians is not going to be simple. It will in fact be extremely difficult and arduous. Owing to Fascism having lasted for twenty years, hundreds of thousands of young Italians of both sexes have no, or only the haziest and most distorted, view of what Italy could be under any other than a Fascist regime. Not only will they have to acquire this knowledge, but first of all they will have to unlearn all the lies and tendentious mischief that has been inculcated into them from infancy by Fascist propaganda, some unconscious influences of which will need to be counteracted even amongst those who have been most refractory to the teachings of Fascism. It is vain to suppose that all Italians are panting to become good little Democrats, whether under a Republic such as that of France or under a constitutional Monarchy such as that of Great Britain. The Western Democracies were consistently vilified and jeered at under Fascism, and during the era of "appeasement" they were regarded with a scornful contempt which, if not justifiable, was at least understandable. The friends of the new Italy must, then, have no illusions and, above all, must exercise great patience. When once the land has been cleared of the weeds which soured it for over twenty years it will bear a good harvest. The Italian people have two invaluable assets. They are hard-working and they are intelligent.

## *Appendix One*

### THE ITALO-GERMAN ALLIANCE

THE preamble ran :—"The German Reich Chancellor and His Majesty the King of Italy and Albania, Emperor of Abyssinia, hold the moment to have arrived to confirm through a solemn Pact the close bonds of friendship and solidarity that exist between Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany.

"Now that through the common frontier, fixed for all time, a sure basis has been created for reciprocal aid and support between Italy and Germany, the two Governments reconfirm the policy which has already been agreed upon by them in its principles and aims and which has proved itself highly advantageous not only for the promotion of the interests of the two countries but equally for the assurance of peace in Europe.

"Closely united by the profound affinity of their conceptions of life and by the complete solidarity of their interests, the Italian and German peoples are determined in the future also to act side by side and with united forces for the security of their living space and the maintenance of peace.

"Along the path marked out for them by history Italy and Germany intend, amidst a world of unrest and in course of dissolution, to fulfil their task of ensuring the bases of European civilization."

The seven articles of the Treaty ran:

"1. The contracting parties will remain in standing contact in order to come to an understanding on all questions touching their common interests and the general situation of Europe.

"2. Should the common interests of the contracting parties be imperilled by international events of any nature whatever, they will immediately enter into discussions upon the measures to be adopted for the protection of these interests. Should the security or other vital interests of one of the contracting parties be threatened from outside the other contracting party will give to the threatened party its full political and diplomatic support with the object of eliminating this threat.

"3. If, contrary to the wishes and hopes of the contracting parties, it should happen that one of them should become involved in hostilities

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with another Power or Powers, then the other contracting party will immediately come to its side as an ally and will support it with all its military forces on land, sea and in the air.

"4. In order to ensure, in the circumstances foreseen, the rapid execution of the treaty obligations undertaken in article 3, the Governments of the two contracting parties will further intensify their collaboration in the military field and in the field of war economy. Similarly the two Governments will remain in constant contact for the adoption of the other measures necessary to the practical application of the provisions of the present Pact. For the objects indicated in the above-mentioned paragraphs 1 and 2, the two Governments will set up permanent committees which will be placed under the direction of the two Foreign Ministers.

"5. The contracting parties undertake forthwith that, in the event of a war conducted in common, they will not conclude an armistice or peace except in full agreement between each other.

"6. The two contracting parties, fully conscious of the importance of their common relations with the Powers friendly to them, are resolved to maintain and develop these relations in common accord also in the future, in harmony with the concordant interests binding them to those Powers.

"7. The Pact comes into force immediately upon signature. The two contracting parties are agreed in fixing at 10 years the first period of its validity. In due time, before the expiry of the period, they will reach agreement over prolongation of the validity of the Pact."

## *Appendix Two*

### TEXT OF SIGNOR MUSSOLINI'S SPEECH OF JUNE 10TH, 1940, ANNOUNCING ITALY'S DECLARATION OF WAR ON GREAT BRITAIN AND FRANCE

**F**IGHTING Men of the land, the sea and the air,  
Black Shirts of the Revolution and of the Legions,  
Men and Women of Italy, of the Empire and of the Kingdom of  
Albania, hearken:

An hour marked by destiny is striking in the sky of our country; the hour of irrevocable decisions. The declaration of war has already been handed to the Ambassadors of Great Britain and France. We are entering the lists against the plutocratic and reactionary Democracies of the West, who have always hindered the advance and often plotted against the very existence of the Italian people. A few lustres of the most recent history can be summed up in these phrases; promises, threats, blackmail and finally, as the coping-stone of the edifice, the ignoble siege of 52 States belonging to the League.

Our conscience is absolutely tranquil. With you the whole world is witness that Italy of the lictor's emblem has done everything that was humanly possible to avoid the tempest which is turning Europe upside-down. But everything was in vain. It would have been sufficient to revise the treaties so as to adapt them to the changing exigencies in the lives of the nations and not to consider them intangible through eternity. It would have been sufficient not to have initiated the stupid policy of guarantees which has shown itself to be fatal above all for those who accepted them. It would have been sufficient not to have rejected the proposals which the Fuhrer made on October 6th after the close of the Polish campaign.

But now all that belongs to the past. If to-day we are determined to face the risks and the sacrifices of a war, the reason is that considerations of honour, interests and the future inflexibly impose this decision on us. Because a great nation is only really such if it considers its engagements as sacred and if it does not shrink from the supreme tests which determine the course of history.

We are taking up arms in order to solve, after the problem of our Continental frontiers has been solved, the problem of our sea frontiers.

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We wish to break the territorial and military chains which are suffocating us in our own sea, since a people of 45 million souls is not truly free unless it has free access to the ocean. This gigantic struggle is only a phase in the logical development of our revolution: it is the struggle of the peoples poor and with a large working population against those who would starve them, who fiercely hold on to the monopoly of all the riches and all the gold of the earth; it is the struggle of the fruitful and young peoples against the sterile peoples already in decline; it is the struggle between two centuries and two ideas.

Now that the die is cast and we have of our own will burned our boats behind us I declare solemnly that Italy does not intend to drag into the conflict other peoples who are her neighbours on land or by sea; let Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey and Egypt take note of these words of mine; it will depend upon them and upon them alone if my words are rigorously confirmed or not.

Italians!—

At a memorable meeting, that in Berlin, I said that, according to the laws of Fascist morality, when one has a friend one goes with him to the very end. We have done this and we will do this with Germany, with her people, with her victorious armed forces.

On this eve of an event of secular importance we address our thoughts to His Majesty, the King Emperor, who has as always interpreted the soul of our country, and we salute with our voices the Fuhrer, the Head of Allied Greater Germany.

Proletarian and Fascist Italy is for the third time on her feet, strong proud and united as never before. The watchword is only one and it is categorical and binding on everybody: already it is flying through the air and kindling hearts from the Alps to the Indian Ocean:—to conquer. And we will conquer! in order to give finally a long period of peace with justice to Italy, to Europe and to the world.

People of Italy, to arms! and show your tenacity, your courage, your worth.



### *Appendix Three*

#### THE DIRECTORATE'S DEMANDS

THE address which was reported on June 14th, 1943, to have been sent through Signor Scorza to Signor Mussolini by the National Directorate ran as follows:

"Duce, the Directorate of the National Fascist Party has approved by acclamation the following declarations which I have the honour to submit to you.

"The Directorate of the National Fascist Party, at the beginning of the fourth year of war, reaffirms the most firm determination of the Black Shirts of the whole of Italy to fight by every means until victory is achieved: it lifts its thoughts to the fallen: it salutes the Italian people, a model of firmness and discipline, and the armed forces which have written pages of glory, the towns martyred by enemy fury, and solemnly recognizes the profoundly national character of the war, which Italy was compelled to enter by enemy hostility, a hostility which was started as far back as 1935 when, in substance, Britain declared war on Italy, which was seeking through the Empire an outlet for its labour, and land for its bread. In this connexion, it reminds those who have forgotten of the origin of 'sanctions' and of all the steps, historically incontestable, taken by the Duce to avoid the conflict: it recognizes the necessity that the people should be brought sternly face to face with the real seriousness of the present hour, so that all may feel themselves directly and personally involved, and so that the efforts of each may be concentrated on resistance and on the achievement of victory.

"For the purpose of resistance the Party Directorate demands:

- "(a) The severe, and where necessary ruthless, repression of all attempts to cause a rift in the moral and material solidarity of the people; should the existing laws be insufficient, new laws must be promulgated.
- "(b) The unification with strict, and where necessary ruthless, control, of industrial production; the unifying control of agricultural production must be perfected.
- "(c) The regulation and more effective control of the supply and distribution of, and the trade in, all goods, implacably elimin-

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ating all interference, over-complicated organization, and corroding and speculative incompetence.

- “(d) The reduction to the indispensable minimum of the economic organizations, many of which have shown themselves to be useless, obsolete, or harmful for the purposes of war economic control, and their incorporation in the framework of the Corporations.
- “(e) The application by the State administration and by all organizations of the most productive dynamic energy, and the abandonment of bureaucratic forms and impediments, which, if tolerable in normal times, are criminal in war-time.
- “(f) The repression by every means of the black market which, although common to all countries in war-time, is absolutely incompatible with Fascist ethics.
- “(g) The Party proposes to continue to follow the road already entered upon, stiffening penalties against offenders, and dealing more severely, where necessary, with those who purchase at excessive prices, as it is precisely these persons who cause the depreciation of our currency in the most harmful way, and multiply the greed of the speculators. It calls upon all members to denounce offenders regardless of who they may be.
- “(h) The strictest control and, where necessary, the closing down, of the big hotels, pensions and luxury restaurants, men's and women's luxury tailoring establishments, luxury shoemakers' and dressmakers' establishments, which do not comply with war-time regulations.
- “(i) Repatriation of all foreigners who cannot justify their presence in Italy, and, where this is not possible, their isolation in places that are not holiday resorts.
- “(j) The strict and complete application of the law on compulsory labour, making a distinction, however, between those who are summoned to fulfil a lofty and noble national duty and those who are compelled to work as the result of police or social security measures.

“The Directorate of the PNF from now on obliges all producers to deliver all their products to the pools, and in its turn assumes the obligation to ensure a more equitable distribution and to prosecute by every means any failure to deliver to the pools that may occur;

“Exacts from the working masses, and from managers and hierarchs of any kind and grade, uninterrupted fulfilment of their duty and their

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work, and production of their maximum output, in order that production in all branches may comply more and more closely with the needs of war;

"Demands from scientists, professors, industrialists and technicians the maximum effort to support the activities of the Armed Forces, bearing in mind that the slightest improvement or the most humble invention may contribute to victory.

"The Directorate of the PNF salutes the Youth of Italy which, on the battle-field, has renewed ancient deeds and provided the best augury for the future, but calls the attention of all young people to the necessity for strict awareness of the moment, and regards discussions on doctrine and metaphysical lucubrations as obsolete and inopportune. The young people know that there is only one doctrine of Fascism, and that it is the one laid down by Benito Mussolini on the eve of the revolution; they know that there is only one way of applying it, namely, by study, work, and fighting: the rest is academic futility.

"The PNF salutes the Old Guard of the Revolution, to-day, as always, standing upright and ready to shed its blood so that the Fatherland may be sound at home and victorious against external enemies; and demands for the Party the supreme honour and burden of being not only the propelling force and centre of dynamic energy of the life of the country, but of assuming the entire responsibility for protecting and defending the nation, for increasing its power and safeguarding its destiny."

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